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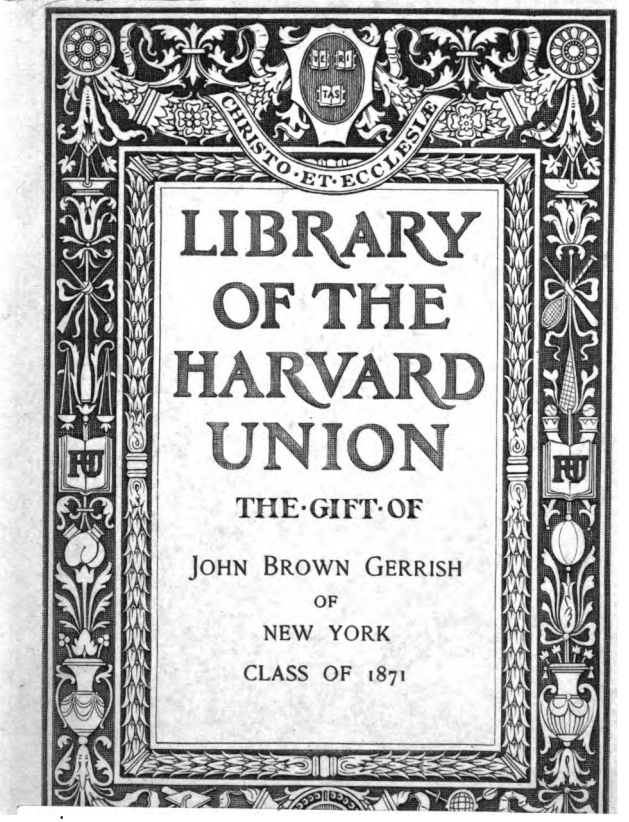

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THE

BELL OF ST. PAUL'S

III

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THE

BELL OF ST. PAUL'S

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN' 'DOROTHY FORSTER'
'FOR FAITH AND FREEDOM' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1889

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SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
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THE

BELL OF ST. PAUL'S

PART II—continued

CHAPTER XIX

IS IT NOT TRUE?

THE single fact that these events seemed of sufficient importance to draw Claudia out of her seclusion is in itself justification for the writing of the whole history. It is what very thoughtful Americans call pivotal, a word so truly beautiful that it should be kept on a shelf to be looked at, like the family punch-bowl. Great and important, indeed, must be that mundane event which could call Claudia from her retirement.

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A Prophetess must necessarily remain in seclusion. The Pythian, who only exercised her functions for one month in the year, remained during the other eleven in strict retirement. If she went out at all it was in a litter borne by spinsters young and old, every one of whom hoped to succeed when their turn should arrive at—say seventy-two or so —to the honour of the three-legged stool. Before the litter marched two by two the six priests, all in white surplices, bawling 'Room for the Lady Pythia!' In the litter lay a veiled figure. But no one saw her face. So the Prophetess of the Early Church stayed at home, invisible, retired. Sometimes in the summer she went forth to take the air in a carriage, veiled, and attended by her niece Flavia. Except by her congregation she was seen by none.

Yet she came forth, one morning, walking, actually walking, as if she had been any ordinary mortal, to call upon Althea. And no one in the street took the least notice of

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her. That was perhaps because the members of her own congregation were all engaged in their work: but in these days when nuns, and sisters, and nurses, and Salvation Majors all jostle on the pavement, dressed some in black with white starched caps broad or narrow, and some in light-blue frocks and poke bonnets and coal-scuttles, admiration is no longer evoked at the sight of a little lady in black silks even in the most unenlightened slum.

The street door of the Doctor's house stood open all day long, for professional reasons. Therefore there was no necessity for ringing, and the visitor opening one of the side doors at hazard discovered Althea alone meditating over her work.

'May I come in?' she asked. 'My name is Claudia Laverock.'

'Oh!' Althea sprang to her feet. 'Aunt Claudia!'

'If you please,' the lady replied smiling. 'If you are Althea, as I suppose, I will be your aunt, or your mother, or your sister, or

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anything you please.' She was dressed in her black silk, with a black lace mantle and black silk gloves: she wore a heavy gold chain round her neck at the end of which was a gold cross: and she looked exactly like an Abbess of a Royal cloister, French or Spanish, reserved for ugly princesses, deformed duchesses, and reduced gentlewomen who could show sixteen quarterings at least: or perhaps like a chanoinesse living in the world and yet not quite belonging to the world, such was the dignity of her carriage. In person she was slight, but no one would call her insignificant: dignity, especially in women, has nothing to do with stature: her eyes were curiously keen and yet they were kindly eyes: Althea, who had never seen her before, began instantly to compare her with her sister Cornelia as one might compare Cassie, pretty, soft and winning, with Flavia prim and demure. There were the same points of likeness and of unlikeness. She had a singularly soft and musical voice: observing the music of her

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voice, the sweetness of her smile, and the kindliness of her eyes one understood her power of attraction. Perhaps it was this power as much as the Prophetic gift which made the Connection believe in her so implicitly.

She closed the door and advanced with both hands outstretched.

'You are Althea,' she repeated. 'I have heard of you, my dear, for many years, since you were a little girl, since the time when my husband died and I came back to my own people—who would have none of me—to preach and prophesy. I have heard of you, but I have never seen you, because I cannot walk up and down the streets like any other woman. I live secluded, save when I am in the Chapel. Flavia comes there every Sunday evening to see me and to hear me. But I have never seen you. Oh! I press no one. Where the Truth is proclaimed, thither should flock all those who love the Truth. No, no, I do not press you—I did not come to speak about

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the Connection, and no doubt my sister Cornelia has prejudiced your mind. Once a person enters the Established Church, you know, she naturally becomes loath to acknowledge Truth——'

'I am sure——' Althea began to protest.

'No, my dear, do not go on. I am not here to speak about the Chapel. It is for quite other things — temporal concerns — earthly interests—that I have come.'

'I am sure it is out of kindness,' said Althea.

'Oh! are you quite sure of that?' the Prophetess murmured very sweetly. 'That was very prettily said, my dear. Let me look at you. Yes—you are a very beautiful girl, and if your eyes tell the truth and Flavia and Felix are not deceived, you are quite as good as you are beautiful. All goodness, all loveliness, I will draw within my chapel walls. You are tall and beautiful—you take after your father, who was also tall and handsome. I

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will sit down, my dear, if you will allow me, because I have got a good deal to say.'

She took a chair, spreading her ample robes as if the chair were a throne. More than her share of the family dignity had fallen to her, yet with queenly graciousness.

'My child,' she said, 'a Thing has been laid upon me. For the most part my mind is fully occupied in spiritual meditations and in prayer. We pray without ceasing, who are the Brotherhood of Early Christians. Yet a Thing wholly temporal has been laid upon me. I say not what that is, and you must not ask me.'

'If it does not concern me,' said Althea, 'why should I seek to know?'

'It may concern you. My dear, suppose it does concern you. I, who never visit even my own people, and see none but the faithful who come to me, have come to see you. Out of kindness—yes, you were right. I would not willingly do anything that might wound the daughter of Clement Indagine or the dear

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friend of my niece Flavia and of my son Felix. But I must talk to you first, and perhaps I may have to say things that seem cruel.'

'I am sure you cannot say cruel things.'

'I am supposed by my people,' said the Prophetess, 'to know everything. I do not try to deceive them, but they willingly believe that. Truly I know very little. I am a servant who speaks what is put into her heart, and does what is laid ready for her hand; these things I may not refuse.' She hesitated. 'My poor child, if I could spare you——'

'What is it?' asked Althea, beginning to be alarmed.

'My dear,' said the Prophetess, taking the girl's hand, 'I am going to ask you a question which only an old and close friend has the right to ask. I am a stranger, but you know me. Believe me, it is from no idle curiosity. It is a very important question, and I cannot tell you, to-day, where the importance lies.

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Will you trust me, then, and give me an answer?'

'You are no stranger,' Althea said. 'I know you already through Cassie and Flavia. I will tell you anything you wish.'

'There is a young man named Oliver Luttrell, the adopted son of Dr. Luttrell'—Althea blushed—'to whom you are engaged.'

'No, no,' said Althea, 'I am not engaged to him.'

'Not engaged to him?'

'No, I am not. And I never shall be.'

'Oh!' The Sybil looked puzzled. 'Then why did Mr. Waller tell my niece Cassandra that you were engaged to him?'

'He was mistaken,' Althea replied, with some show of confusion.

'Yet that was the reason he went away. You know that, my dear, do you not?'

'I—believe so,' Althea replied.

'And if he knew that he was perhaps—mistaken, he might come back—is it not so?'

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Althea made no reply to this at all.

'Well, but, my dear, Flavia went yesterday evening to see the young man at his Laboratory. She went to reproach him; and he laughed at her, and said he was going to marry you in three months' time.'

'He is very greatly mistaken,' said Althea quickly. 'Oh! but he has no right at all. I will tell you exactly what has happened. It is two months or so since he began to pretend that he was in love with me—in order to please my father and my uncle I told him—what any girl might have said—that if I could think of him at any time that way, I would become engaged to him. But nothing has been said since—he has not even been here—and now I know that it is impossible. Quite—quite impossible.'

'Would nothing make you change your mind?'

'Nothing.'

'Could you not by trying, still in order to please your father, bring yourself to love him?'

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'No—never.'

'Suppose he were to come to you bearing a great fortune in his hands, would not that——'

'Oh! a fortune! How would that help me? But it is quite impossible—I could never even think of him in that way.'

'You were brought up together, in this house. Does not the recollection of that time soften your heart towards him?'

'Oliver is my brother, I must always be interested in him: nothing that he can say or do is indifferent to us here. But he will never be anything more to me.'

The Prophetess seemed gratified by this news. She smiled gravely and nodded her head. Then she took Althea's hand once more in hers and gently patted and pressed it. She was a very sympathetic Prophetess.

'My dear,' she said, 'better to be a lonely woman all your life than to marry a man whom you have never loved. But you will not remain lonely. That is not your fate.

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Well, my dear, you are free, and what I thought would be a painful task is spared me.'

'I do not understand.'

'No: there are some things better not understood until the time comes,' she replied darkly. 'In earthly concerns as in spiritual there are times of fulfilment when the wicked are overtaken and the saints are released from the oppressor and the cry of the poor is heard. Rest assured, child, that no harm will come to you.'

She rose as if to go, but first she looked round the room. Her eyes fell upon the portrait of the poet hanging over the mantel-shelf.

'Oh,' she said, 'that is your father. I suppose he is changed. But I remember him like this thirty years ago and more, when I was a school girl. Yes, he used to come over to see his brother Æneas, your uncle. Æneas was a harum-scarum fellow and he got into debt and ran away, and I never heard what

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became of him. We girls used to look after Clement and whisper each other what a lovely young man he was. After my sister died I heard more about the two brothers. They were the sons of a poor gentleman who died in the Queen's Bench—he was kept there by Mr. Norbery himself—his own brother-in-law, though that I did not learn till afterwards. Oh! he was a hard man. Clement would never so much as speak of his uncle, Lucy told me.'

'Who was Lucy?'

'Have you never heard of Lucy?' Mrs. Laverock laughed a little. 'Oh! but you ought to know about Lucy, because I think before long you will be very much interested in her. Lucy was my cousin, and when my sister died she became housekeeper to Mr. Norbery, then she got married and went away to Australia. Such a bright clever girl she was—not so pretty as her sister Florry—poor Florry! poor thing—but cheerful and happy. Oh! the old times—I often wonder, my dear,

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if they ever really existed—if I was ever really young and pretty. Oh! how happy it must be to be young and pretty!' The Prophetess at this point became perfectly human and womanly. 'Sometimes it seems to me as if the only happiness in life is to be young and beautiful. But these two girls, my cousins, were terribly poor, and we were unable to do much for them—and Florry went away—she had better have stayed with her sister. Poor Florry! she was my favourite, but my sister Julia loved Lucy. The old days! the old days! My dear,' she sat down again, 'you will hear a great deal more about Lucy, I promise you.' Again she laughed and nodded her head.

'Shall I?' Althea replied with indifference. The name of Lucy did not attract her.

'I must go away I suppose.' But she did not get up. 'My dear, you can come to see me if you like—not at the Chapel but at home. Come in the afternoon when I have tea. In

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the evening I am always with my people and in the morning I am alone—with my soul.'

'I will come, thank you.'

'I hear about you from Flavia and from Felix—my son Felix—' she added the last words with a little softening of the voice. 'My son is a good boy, though as yet the Early Church has not been able to number him among the fold. He thinks more about his old friends of the Poly. But he is a good boy, and just now he is unhappy.'

'Are we all unhappy?' asked Althea.

'He is unhappy on account of his cousin Cassie. Young men are so silly about girls. And Cassie is crying her eyes out, he says, for this other young man—this wicked young man, Oliver, who has jilted her.'

'Oh, no,' Althea cried. 'That cannot be. Why, Cassie herself told me over and over again—and Oliver assured me—that there never was anything between them.'

'My dear, girls are proud about these things. Cassie said that which was not

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true. And the young man cruelly laughs at her.'

'Oh! is it possible?'

'Everything is possible with those who belong to the world. But the young man shall be punished.' Her face hardened for a moment as she pronounced this judgment. 'My boy—my son Felix—' again she became perfectly human and womanly. 'My Felix—is he not a great strong man? But he takes after his father—is foolish about Cassie. They are the same age and he loves her—at least he says so—men are always foolish about girls, you know—and he is mad about it. My dear Felix wanted to go and horsewhip this young man. But we have dissuaded him because there is a more certain way. I came here fearing that to punish Oliver would be to humiliate you. But that is not so.'

'I would rather that he was forgiven or left to himself.'

'He must be punished, and that in such a way as to tear the last illusions from Cassie's

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eyes and to show him such as he is. Leave this man to me, Althea.' She was again the Prophetess. 'The wicked dig pits for others and fall therein themselves. They set nets and are caught in them. Leave him to me.' With these words which left behind them a prophetic foreboding of wrath to fall upon the head of the guilty she rose once more to go.

'My dear,' she said, stopping again, 'I have seen Mr. Waller. He came to my Chapel with Flavia. He is a tall and handsome young man. He went away because he thought you were engaged to another man, did he not?' She again pressed Althea's hands in her own with warm and sympathetic grasp. 'Oh! because he loves you so much that he cannot bear to think that you belong to another man——'

'Oh! please—please say no more. He is gone.'

'He would come back again if he thought —he would fly back on the wings of the wind

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if he knew. Shall he come back, my dear? Oh! shall he—shall he come back to you, my dear—my dear? Shall we bring him back?'

She purred and murmured and whispered these words so full of consolation and of hope, with voice so soft and melodious, with smile so sweet, with eyes so gracious and affectionate that the girl's heart glowed within her. Then without any other force than the mesmeric power of sympathy and love, she drew—this little dainty Prophetess drew down to her own level the girl's tall head and kissed her, as with a benediction, on the forehead.

Then she went away leaving behind her such a glow and warmth of hope and happiness as might have reminded Althea of the day when she floated down the river of molten gold in a purple cloud to meet the man who was come all the way from the Antipodes to be her lover.

Was there ever such a Prophetess? Yet how could she bring him back? Other Prophets have had their gifts. The Lady Pythia,

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for a thousand years; Nostradamus; the Red-faced Nixon; Doctor Francis Moore; Mother Shipton—they could all foretell the future—especially if there was anything nasty in it, as mostly there is. But could any of them—could any Prophet ever known—except Claudia—bring a straying lover back to the arms of his mistress?

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CHAPTER XX

THE FUGITIVE RETURNS

It was a wet evening in August, when the summer appeared to have suddenly taken to itself wings and fled away to some more happy isle. The evening was still young, and broad daylight, with clouds driving across a grey, not a blue sky, and rain lashing and pelting the black face of the river made Bank Side look miserable indeed. On such an evening Father Thames scowls and threatens: he who creeps forth to the nearest Bridge resolved to jump over and have done with it sees below him an angry flood which promises to roll him over and over and to keep the life long in him while it dashes him to and fro, breaking arms and legs against the sides

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of barges and prolonging the horror of death out of mere bad temper and malignity. The prospect affrights the poor wretch and he shrinks back and goes home again resolved to bear a little longer—at least till better weather—the misfortunes which beset him: one would not willingly have one's last impressions of the world set in so gloomy a frame: if we must depart without leave, uncalled and uninvited, even against orders, let us have the stars twinkling over us and the moon riding in splendour to redeem the horror of the final jump. On such a night, to the residents on Bank Side the wooden wall looks mean and the barges squalid: the piles of rusty chain and scrap iron fill the soul with sadness: it is as if life were henceforth to be spent among the shucks and shards, the duds and rags, the broken bits, the scraps, and the used-up things of life, as if one was condemned to become a Lazarus sitting outside the back gate of the mansion, in the place where they shoot their rubbish, not in the

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street, or on the doorstep within view and within reach of any Lord Dives and his friends. There arises before the mind an image as of Marine Stores. One looks around for the Black Doll. One feels the actual Proprietorship of a Rag and Bone Emporium.

Such an evening is especially depressing on a summer evening when it is still light and one cannot draw the curtains, make up the fire and sit round it. To be cold and comfortless in August is a kind of robbery. It is everywhere mournful; but there are some houses in which it is maddening—those, namely, in which the good old rule is maintained which allows no fire from the first of May to the end of October, rage the weather ever so Arctically. Cornelia maintained that rule.

Therefore, Cassie would have shivered and Sempronius would have crammed his hands in his pockets had the times been at their happiest. But it was more than the depression caused by slighted Sirius which covered,

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this evening, the faces of all with a cloud of the blackest gloom and despondency. Dejection was written on all their faces, except perhaps on that of the boy, who had a book and was far away from Bank Side—on the broad Pacific Ocean in fact, and in very bad company—pirates, indeed, flying the Jolly Roger, snapping up Spaniards and merrily making them walk the plank.

It was the presence of disaster. A fortnight ago it was threatened. Now it was upon them and the outlook was charged with blackness.

'Children,' said the Head of the House, striking his right hand into his waistcoat—it is always a dignified action, though of late, since the suppression of the laced ruffle, it has lost much of its effectiveness. 'Children, I begin to think that I am—ha, ha!—antiquated—actually antiquated. An experience with the procedure of the Courts and Chamber practice extending over thirty years has left your father, I believe—antiquated—I am no

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longer wanted.' Flavia looked up and murmured disbelief. 'Yes—that appears to be the case—I am no longer wanted. I suppose that even if Mr. Polter, Q.C., were himself to return he would be no longer wanted. Services such as I can render—I used to think they were such as few can render—are no longer appreciated. They now require, I am told, a young man who will bring business—bring—bring——' he repeated with sarcasm, 'will bring business. They want a man who knows Solicitors' clerks. That is the new way of things. Formerly—must I say in my time?—we received business. What would Mr. Polter have said to me had I proposed to bring him business? We received it: we conferred an obligation on those who brought it—merely by receiving it. And we—the men of our position in the Higher Branch did not know — we would not know — Solicitors' clerks.'

'Have you found anything, Cassie?' Flavia whispered.

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Cassie shook her head.

'I can never forget,' continued their father, 'the dignity with which Mr. Polter, Q.C., received a brief. Some of his manner, I have been told, fell upon myself. Am I lost to the Higher Branch? It would seem so. After a man has been upon the Higher Branch of what use is he elsewhere? The machinery of the Law—the practice at Court and in Chambers, the endorsement of the Briefs—the conduct of the barrister's business—these are intricacies which I have at my finger ends.'

'I have tried everywhere,' whispered Cassie. 'There seems nothing to be got.'

'What else do I know? Apart from a liberal education and whatever the use of an extensive library has given to me—nothing. Can I make a boot? Can I sell a yard of calico? There is no opening for one who has served for thirty years in the society of barristers and gentlemen—in the Higher Branch.'

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'There's heaps of girls,' Cassie continued in a low voice, 'who will take anything—anything—girls who have been taught things and can write French and German. I know nothing.'

'Children, since all industry is honourable you will not be ashamed of your father should you see him steering a wheelbarrow on a plank between Bank and barge. I have still my hands and my legs—' he extended one; it was both short and thin. 'I believe that half-a-crown a day can be earned upon the plank.'

Sempronius, bending over his book in his customary corner, looked up and choked. Then he blushed guiltily, and again he choked. He belonged to the large but unhappy class of boys who are seized at the wrong moment with an overpowering desire to laugh. I know one poor man who would certainly have made an excellent Bishop—he actually wanted to be a Bishop—but is now nothing but a story-teller because he could not choose but

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laugh whenever the desire seized him. He has been known to disgrace a funeral by untimely mirth. And he was forced to renounce an ecclesiastical career from the dread, nay, the certainty, that something would some day occur to him which would make him laugh in the pulpit. Sempronius is perhaps destined to furnish another illustration of this unfortunate weakness. The picture of his parent in black trousers, frock coat, and a tall hat walking up and down a plank behind a wheelbarrow was too much, and he stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth — the only counter-irritant yet discovered.

'Nature,' continued his father with severity, 'as you will find admirably put in your grandfather's work, Sempronius, compels us to eat: this is the Universal Law. If we would eat we must work. Another Universal Law. Again, work must be honest. This is a moral Law. Therefore all honest work must be honourable. If it is no longer possible for me to remain in the Higher Branch

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I shall cheerfully accept whatever else may offer, even if it be the handle of the wheelbarrow.'

'Nobody wants girls,' Cassie continued, gloomily.

'Patience,' said her sister. 'Something will turn up.'

They relapsed into gloomy silence. Things apparently were at their blackest. At this point, they always mend. Unfortunately, long after they have seemed as black as Erebus, they sometimes grow blacker still, incredibly black. In this case they might certainly have grown much worse. The family still had a house over their heads: Cornelia had her salary and Flavia hers—at the worst it would be a tight fit for a while. But a tight fit continued a little too long may mean a drop in gentility afterwards irrecoverable. What, for instance, would be life to a young lady in the Telegraph Department without gloves?

'Last night,' said Cornelia, breaking

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silence, 'I heard the ringing of bells and dreamed of cracking nuts. If I know anything, this means good fortune.'

'Well,' said Flavia, 'if we can't get good fortune, I suppose there's some consolation in dreaming about it. Let us all wish. Father, I wish you a better Guarantee—Cassie, I wish you better luck, and more cheerful looks—and I wish—I wish—yes, I think the very best thing that could happen for all of us would be for Mr. Waller to come back again.'

What followed is almost incredible.

For, at that very moment, when the words were yet vibrating in the air, a Hansom cab drove along Bank Side from the Blackfriars end. A Hansom cab on Bank Side—except sometimes in business hours—is indeed an unusual thing to see. This cab drew up at their door, and none other than Mr. Waller himself, portmanteau, sticks and umbrella, hat-box and bundle of rugs, jumped out.

'Oh! good gracious!' cried Flavia. 'Why—here he is! He's actually come!

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Just as we were wishing for him! Oh! let's run to meet him!'

Yes, he was among them again. He was shaking hands with everybody, especially with the girls: he was pulling Sempronius by the ear: he was hearing the news: he was listening to Lucius discoursing upon the withdrawal of the Guarantee and to Flavia over Cassie's loss of place. He was running upstairs with his things and down again. And all their hearts were lifted and all their eyes were bright. What he was going to do no one knew. But that something would be done now he was come was certain.

'Mr. Waller,' said Flavia, a horrid thought piercing her like a knife. 'Are you only come to say good-bye before you go back to Australia?'

'No—if I may stay—if I may have the Best Bedroom again—thank you—I should like to make a little longer visit than a day or two, you good kind people.' He held out one hand to Aunt Cornelia, who had been the

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first to nod at the mention of the Best Bedroom, and the other to Cassie. 'I have been thinking about you ever since I went away. I have been to the Lakes and about—here and there—and always my thoughts came back to Bank Side.'

'That,' said Flavia, 'we can very well understand.'

'There were things I had left unfinished, and things I wanted to see worked out. And so—and so—I have come back, you see.'

'Oh, it's wonderful,' said Flavia.

Just for a further proof of the miraculous nature of his return, the rain left off suddenly: the clouds blew away: the smiling sun shone out: clear and high against the blue sky showed the great dome of Paul's, and the river sparkled and danced.

'It's wonderful,' Flavia repeated. 'Aunt Cornelia, I do believe it's your dream of the ringing bells.'

If he had gone away melancholy he came

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back lively. He was in the best of spirits—he laughed all over—he made them feel, instantly, what a desperately foolish thing it was to repine over being out of work. Everything was easy—everything would turn out well: the world was the best of all possible worlds.

'Come outside, Cassie,' he said presently, 'come out, Flavia. Let us go and look at the barges.'

'It was here,' he said, when they stood above the Bank Side stairs, 'that you and Althea came out of the sunset, Cass. You remember?'

'Yes, I remember.'

'Oliver met you and carried the oars home for you. You remember, Cassie?'

'Yes, I remember.'

'Cassie,' he said—he had taken her hand and held it—'you made a terrible mistake: you will get over it—I am certain you will get over it. And I made another.'

'What was yours?'

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'I told you that—that—Althea was engaged to him.'

'Well?' cried Flavia.

'Well——' he laughed. 'You know he isn't.'

'Oliver says he is.'

'He may say what he pleases. He is not.'

'How do you know it, Mr. Waller?'

'A bird in the air sang it to me: the wind on the hillside above Rydal Water whispered it in my ears: a voice came to me in the night.'

'So you have come back,' said Flavia, gravely.

. . . . . .

'Lucius,' said Cornelia, 'remember what I told you before. This talk about Sir David Waller is all rubbish and nonsense. That young man is Cousin Lucy's son. I do not know how he came by his money and his fine clothes. Let us hope, honestly.'

'I should indeed hope so. But, Sister——'

'Lucy's son, I tell you. After such behaviour as Lucy's to me, which I shall never

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forget, there are few women who would forgive her. But I do,' she added with the sniff of forgiveness. 'And I will not visit her sins upon her son. But I should like to get to the bottom of this, brother, and now that he has come back to us, I shall try to find it out. Lucy's son—oh! her face, her eyes, her voice, her very way of laughing. They were a pretty pair of sisters, those two; and him to come masquerading as the son of a great man! Well, I'm glad he's come back, but I mean to find out what it means. Lucy's own son!'

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CHAPTER XXI

A MORNING ON DUTY

'My dear young friend!' Mr. Indagine jumped out of his chair and welcomed him with both hands and a sudden sunlight in his eyes. 'You have come back to us! I thought you would never come back. Althea —my child—' he raised his voice so as to be heard in the other room. 'Come quickly. Come to welcome Mr. Waller.'

Althea obeyed. She came in with a blush upon her cheek and gave Laurence her hand with downcast eyes. This wonderful Prophetess! Then she took refuge behind her father.

'You are welcome indeed,' he repeated

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with a deep sigh. 'Oh! If you only knew how greatly we have missed you!'

'It was impossible to stay away, you see,' Laurence replied, looking, perhaps by accident, at Althea. 'I was obliged to come back.'

'Obliged to come back,' the Poet echoed, with satisfaction unbounded. 'Nay—nay—you overestimate the society of a poet. But you are privileged—in this house you can say anything you please. Sit down—I have quantities of things to say. Sit down—sit down.'

He pushed his young friend into the easy chair and went on talking.

'Well—it is a real pleasure to have you back again. You look better, too. That last day you were here—I remember—you looked unhappy. Something had gone wrong.'

'Yes,' Laurence replied. 'Something had gone very wrong indeed. But I have come back'—this time he was careful not to look at Althea—'with hope renewed.'

'That is very good hearing. Well—you shall hear what has happened to me. First of

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all, I have carried out my promise. I have returned to the world. Only once, as yet, it is true, but it has been enough to prove the reality and to gauge the depth of that fame which you, my friend, were the first to reveal to me.'

'Indeed?' asked Laurence, a shade of anxiety falling upon his face. 'How was that?'

'When I think of it, I am really astonished. Even the most sanguine of men could not expect such a thing. And after thirty years to be actually recognised!'

'What did happen?'

'What should you think of a Popular Reception?'

'What?' Laurence started and sat upright.

'Of an Ovation—a Public Triumphal March?'

'An ovation?'

'Nothing less, my young friend, I assure you. Nothing less. And of the most amazing character.'

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'Really?' This was indeed bewildering. This impostor—who had himself counterfeited the Voice of Fame, felt as if the earth was going round under his feet. 'A Triumphal March?'

'You shall hear. We took a walk—Althea was with me—through the City. After lingering a little in Paternoster Row we walked down Ludgate Hill and through Fleet Street. To be sure my appearance was quite public: there was no attempt at concealment: we walked openly and it was mid-day—I was looking about me, pointing out to Althea some of the old places and their literary associations and marking the changes that have been made in the street. It was quite full of people—men—congregated on the pavement and talking—when suddenly, to my intense surprise, I found that I was actually recognised!'

'Recognised!' Laurence grasped the arm of the chair to steady himself. 'Who recognised you? One of your old friends?'

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'No—no—I met none of my old friends. I wish now that they had all been present—my lukewarm friends with my enemies, to see and hear. I was recognised—I confess that it is most astonishing—I was suddenly and universally recognised—I cannot imagine how my face came to be known to them—by the assembled multitude——'

'Good Heavens!' In a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—there glanced through the mind of this conscience-stricken deceiver a dramatic possibility, how the thing that he had invented only to please Althea might actually, without his own knowledge, have really taken place—that the Poet's reputation had actually grown during these thirty years as he had deceitfully fabled and represented, so that he was in sober reality famous. If so——

'The street,' Mr. Indagine went on, 'was, I say, crowded with people. In the old days it was never so full. None of them seemed to resemble the men who used to frequent Fleet

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Street and sit in the Taverns. It was a crowd which a man might set down as comparatively humble. Yet their faces were intelligent and they were greatly animated and they knew me, one and all.'

'Good Heavens!' cried Laurence—'this is wonderful.'

'Is it not? Suddenly some one cried out my name—the word flew from mouth to mouth—we were mobbed, though respectfully—even reverentially.'

'Your name—did they cry out "Mr. Clement Indagine"?'

'No. They cried out "The Poet! There is the Poet!" or "Look at the Poet," or words to that effect. It really was, and will ever remain, the proudest moment of my life. It was nothing short of an ovation that they gave me—nothing less, as I said, than a Triumphal March that we made.'

Laurence turned with amazement to Althea.

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'I cannot tell,' she said, 'how the people came to know who he was. There were great crowds standing about, and they kept crying "The Poet! the Poet! Three to two upon the Poet!" It was wonderful. And yet they seemed not to be looking at him.'

'Among the people,' said the Poet, 'in places when you would least expect it, there is a natural delicacy of feeling which is very pleasant to experience. They knew, of course, how distasteful it would have been to have all eyes turned upon me. Therefore they averted their heads, though they could not restrain their feelings. I respect them all the more.'

'Three to two upon the Poet,' Laurence repeated. Then he suddenly laughed and as suddenly became solemn again. 'Why,' he said, 'it must have been most surprising, and —and—as you say, truly gratifying.' Then his lips parted again as one who wished to laugh, and his eyes twinkled as one who laughed inwardly, and once more he hardened

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his face and became as solemn as a clown at a christening.

'Stay with me this morning,' said the Poet. 'I have a great deal more to tell you. Althea, my dear, will you leave us alone?'

'Oh!' the young man's face lengthened. 'I was—I was in hopes,' he said, 'that Miss Indagine would take me on the river this morning.'

Indeed, Althea was already dressed in her jacket and straw hat.

'Cassie is going with me,' she said. 'You must stay here, Mr. Waller, please. My father has a great deal to discuss with you. Now that you have come back I can leave him with a lighter heart. The excitement of his great success and the shouts of the people'—she laid her hand upon her father's—'have made him restless of late. Our old tranquillity is broken up. Will you stay here? Thank you. Perhaps now that I know he is in good hands I shall see some of my old

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ghosts again. And perhaps,' she added with what, in other girls, would have been a touch of coquetry, 'I may find you here when I come back.'

She laughed and ran away.

'See, Mr. Waller,' said her father, 'you have made Althea look happier already. Since you went away she has hardly smiled. It is the way of the girl. She knew that I was unhappy in losing you. She saw me restless for want of that communion of soul with soul which I had resumed after long abstinence. My friend, I did not conceal my sense of loss, and it made her unhappy too. It is her sympathetic way. Personally, of course, you were nothing to her except for your services to me. But it is her way.'

'It is a very charming way.'

'Yes. You may have remarked that she is pale and there are rings round her eyes. She inherits this quickness of sympathy from me. It is the only part of the poetic nature which she does inherit. But she will brighten

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up—nay, she has already begun—now we shall all be happier again.'

The simple faith in his power of bringing happiness along touched the young man with a little shame. True, he had brought happiness, but by what means?

'I will read you a few things that I have corrected and arranged—things new and old—well, you shall judge.'

He laid his hand upon a bulky pile of MSS. At another time the heart of the listener would have quailed. Now he felt not only resigned but even happy. It is only when a poet is reading his verses or when the parson is preaching, or while a piece of classical music is played that one can surrender the thoughts to perfect freedom and let them ramble and roam at their own sweet will. It is only at such times that one can sit at ease and peace while the imagination wanders and strays among flowery lanes and grassy banks. Laurence reclined in his chair with half-closed eyes, while his thoughts, un-

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disturbed, dwelt upon the virtues and the graces of his mistress.

'I must show you,' the Poet went on, 'what progress I have made in my new volume. See—here is the Manuscript very nearly ready for the printers. Now for a little surprise for you—I intended it as a secret. But you shall have it at once. This manuscript, my friend, is going to be your own. I shall give it to you as a possession and an heirloom for your children's children.'

'This is indeed a great favour,' said Laurence cordially. 'I hope I know how to value it aright.'

'Nay, you deserve it. I had intended to arrange the poems for posthumous publication. But recent events have changed my resolution. A Poet has no right to be silent. I now understand that: he fails in his duty if he fails to deliver his message: he should continually prophesy: he belongs essentially to the whole People: he is theirs in a sense granted to no one else: it is his duty to find

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words for their thoughts: he is to be their Voice: he owes to the People everything in himself that is good and noble: for their sake he must cultivate great thoughts and live a pure live: to defile his life is to defile the stream of thought at the fountain head: to refuse work is high treason to his mission: to withhold his work when it is completed as a kind of robbery. Yes—I understand—Heaven forgive me! I have committed this sin of treason. I have robbed the People of their own."

He spoke in tones of exaltation. Surely such a man—one who held the office of Poet in honour so high—should be himself a great Poet. Honour and respect so great deserve that recompense.

'I am going,' he continued, 'to read to you this morning my forthcoming poems. Let me first arrange my papers.'

While he was arranging his papers Laurence drew a letter from his pocket and read it. The letter was as follows:

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'My dear Cousin,—I know perfectly well who you are; partly because I learned long ago that my cousin Lucy married a certain David Waller of Rotherhithe, boat builder, and that she emigrated with him when his affairs became involved: partly because in your face and eyes and your voice you resemble your mother so closely that no doubt is possible.

'It has been laid upon me as a plain duty that I should communicate with you. I wish first, to seek your counsel upon a matter very close to me—the welfare of my son: and next I am anxious to save you and another person from unhappiness. I know why you hastily went away. You thought that a certain girl was engaged. That is not so. She is not engaged to the young man of whom you think, she never has been engaged to him: she never will be. You hurriedly jumped to a false conclusion. Come back, therefore, with what speed you may, and with a full confidence that nothing stands between you and the end which you desire.

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'My dear cousin, in things earthly we of the Early Church make and meddle only as they may serve things spiritual. If I, who am called a Prophetess, interfere in an affair of the heart, it is because I am convinced that Althea Indagine and you are of those who climb upwards by means of earthly happiness. Others there are—and these are the majority—who are led to things spiritual by sorrow, misfortune, sickness or disappointment.

'There are other reasons why you should come back immediately. Trouble has fallen upon my Brother Lucius and his household. He has himself lost his place and cannot find another. My niece Cassandra has also lost her place and cannot find another. Besides, she is fretting about a worthless man. The whole family will shortly have to depend upon the scanty earnings of my sister Cornelia and my niece Flavia. I take it that more than curiosity brought Lucy's son to Bank Side: I hear that your father has arrived at distinction and I hope wealth: I hope that you will

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be able to do something for your cousins. But come back. As for him who brought the trouble upon Cassie and caused you to think a falsehood, there is preparing for him an outpouring of wrath which he little imagines or suspects. I speak not of the certain punishment for sin, but of quick and sudden confusion.

'When, my dear young cousin, I look forward into the future and watch your figure moving onwards with the years that roll us always nearer and nearer to the Steps of the Throne, I see nothing but happiness before you, shadowed with the sorrows which must certainly happen in every earthly life. You will have Love, which hallows everything. If you meet with worldly success it shall not harden your heart, for Love will keep it soft. If you fall upon adversity, Love will enable you to bear it. The Early Church was founded on Love. In our Connection it is Love which binds us together. Cousin, I have but one message to repeat to the world which still forgets it.

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Those who love cannot sin against each other. With us in the Early Church some may be husbands and some wives. But all love each other. This is our Creed—Love is all. If I can teach you that, your stay in this poor place will have been hallowed indeed.

'Your affectionate Cousin,

'CLAUDIA.'

Laurence finished the letter—he had already read it a dozen times—and folded it carefully. 'I have obeyed you, Claudia,' he said, 'I have obeyed you and I am here.'

'I am now ready, my friend,' said the Poet.

Laurence sat well back, shading his face as one who desires to concentrate his attention—in fact he did intend to do this, though for another purpose. Then the Poet began to read and his listener sat perfectly still and offered no interruption whatever.

'She is not engaged after all,' thus his thoughts began to run—'she is not engaged,' these words ran like the refrain that you may

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sometimes hear if you close your eyes in the rolling of a railway train, 'and something dreadful is going to happen to Mr. Oliver Luttrell. What will happen to him, I wonder? What is he after? Is the Prophetess able to cause misfortune as well as to foretell happiness? And what does she want with me? And Althea is not engaged—Althea, the goddess, who came out of the sunset. She is free, and I am back again. And she was unhappy because I was gone. Oh! Althea, Althea!'

And the Poet went on reading his verses, sheet after sheet, with satisfaction unutterable. For the shouts of the multitude, the praise of the 'Saturday Review,' and the sympathy of the young man who had come all the way from Australia in order to gaze upon him, filled his mind once more with the old belief in his own powers: never since the days when he first began to write verse and to read his poems over alone locked up in his own room, had he been so strongly moved by the

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beauty and the strength and depth of his verses.

'Oliver is coming in for wrath,' Laurence continued following on. 'I wonder how he will take it. Is Felix going to visit him with the weight of his long arm? Lucius has had to come down from the Higher Branch, and Cassie is out of place. Poor Cassie! and I am to do something for them all—and Althea is free——'

And the voice of the Poet was like unto the drone of the bumble bee among the sweet peas.

'In the house of a general practitioner in about the meanest part of London,' he thought, 'among streets which are squalid and people inexpressible, with no friends, except these artless cousins of mine, has grown up this flower of maidenhood, more delicate, more refined, than any of her sisters who live in the world. None of the meanness of her surroundings appears in her: it is as if this house was a calm cloister in the midst of the

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wicked world. She has lived with books and with this man—who has trained her in the poetry which he vainly emulates and in the lofty thoughts which he has borrowed and thinks his own. And she is free—and more beautiful than ever.'

Two hours later Althea came back from her row up the river. It was, no doubt, the fresh breeze upon the river which had taken the dark lines from her eyes and restored their sunshine, given colour to her pale cheek and life to her drooping figure.

She opened the door and looked in, smiling.

'Well,' she said, 'if you have finished, you two, will you come to lunch?'

Laurence was sitting in the easy chair, his long legs outstretched, his head bent forward, his elbows on the arms of the chair and his hands leaning against each other by the finger tips. It was an attitude of profound attention —so profound that the thinker might have seemed asleep. The poet, regardless, went on

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mouthing his hollow o'es and a'es in rapt enjoyment of his own numbers. But at the girl's voice Laurence sprang to his feet.

'We have had,' he said, 'a most delightful morning.' He took the Poet's hand and pressed it warmly. 'You will not ask me,' he murmured, 'for a critical opinion. I have been quite carried away. My mind has been filled with beautiful thoughts ever since you began to read. And now, Miss Indagine, may I be at your service for the rest of the day?'

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CHAPTER XXII

AN AFTERNOON ON LEAVE

NOTHING more moves and softens the heart of man than a feast given in his honour. It need not be a great banquet at all: quite poor persons may give this banquet: nothing is wanted but the outward signs of welcome —the unusual adornments: the freshly cut flowers: the white napery: the little extra care over the dishes or the little extra display in their presentment. Laurence had never before broken bread at this household: he knew nothing of the household arrangements: yet he understood at once that Althea had decked the board with her own hands to do him honour. And though cold mutton formed

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the staple of the meal, there were flowers fetched from the neighbouring market—the Covent Garden of the Borough: there were plums and pears for dessert also from that hospitable emporium: there was a most delicate confection of apples and cream made by Althea's own hands: and though plain beer—that at eight and six the nine gallon cask—formed the daily beverage of her father and her uncle, there was placed upon the table a square bottle the fragrance of which was alone sufficient to diffuse happiness. Laurence also remarked—Cassie being another guest—that both the girls had put on their best things. Cassie, indeed, looked as if a prayer-book alone were wanted to complete her costume. As for Althea, she had put on the one fine frock she possessed; it was of light blue, which suited her fair complexion, and she wore a dainty little ruff round her neck, though that charming part of feminine attire is no longer, I believe, in fashion, and she had a rose-bud at her throat.

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'My dear,' cried her father, 'what have you done to yourself? You look changed indeed. It is from pure joy, Mr. Waller, because you have come back to me.'

Althea laughed and blushed a little. Then they all sat down and the cold leg of mutton became transformed into some rare and costly dish such as a Roman emperor of old would purchase with the annual revenues of three provinces.

The Doctor, for whom nobody ever waited, came home early in the celebration of the banquet and found feasting and laughter in his generally silent house. Never had the Poet, even in his youthful days, when he sat among the Wits been more animated, never had Althea a brighter glow on her cheeks or a sunnier light in her eyes. Domestic joy, however, is a fragile kind of thing: a shower is always threatening: a cloud comes up in a minute: snow is even possible: and I have known a glacial wind to arise on a June-like evening, with sleet and hail and piercing cold

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in the most unexpected manner and in the happiest circle.

'We only want Oliver,' said the Doctor, looking about him cheerfully. 'With Oliver we should be complete.'

Althea flushed crimson, and Cassie bent her head. The Poet remembered something of what his daughter had said to him and dimly perceived, though his mind was naturally filled with his own verses, that this was an unfortunate remark. The Doctor, who had no verses to occupy his mind, more readily understood that something—he knew not what—was unfortunate in his remark.

A little thing, but for the moment it marred the festival. They went on talking and laughing, but there remained just a little constraint. And Cassie laughed no more. Melancholy, to think that one may introduce the harsh note of discord even when one possesses the most musical ear and is guided by the most harmonious intentions. In a better world, perhaps, we shall be able to

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read each other's soul through and through, so that no such mishap shall occur.

'And now,' said Althea, 'if you are still willing to take so much trouble, Mr. Waller, you shall show us the West End of London and your great fashionable World.'

Laurence was more than willing. Certainly, he would have preferred Althea alone, perhaps because a Hansom Cab is more pleasant than its elder brother: perhaps, because he was young and in love. However, better with Cassie than not at all; and indeed, the girl looked pretty, and brighter than she had been wont to since her lover's desertion.

They plunged into the West End by way of Stamford Street, Westminster Bridge and St. James's Park and in a four-wheel. Few of those who belong to the World of Fashion, unless they happen to be professionals of the Music Hall, approach its gilded halls by the way of Stamford Street. The Park was beautiful as it always is all the year round. But the leaves were falling off the trees and

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the walks and grass were covered with children playing and the unemployed asleep and presenting wonderful studies of foreshortening to the observant artist.

'It is a beautiful place,' said Althea, 'and I like the ducks. But the people are no better-looking than in Southwark Park.'

Then Laurence led them up the steps commanded by the Duke of York and showed them the street of Club Palaces.

'Your father,' he said, 'thought that the Poets and Wits congregate still in Fleet Street. But they have left it long ago and now they sit in the Athenæum Club with the Bishops. I don't know what splendid epigrams they make on the Bishops, because no one ever tells, outside. No doubt the Club is always bubbling with laughter.'

Then he led them up Waterloo Place to Regent Street.

It was in the middle of September. Every newspaper that respects itself had already said, once, but not more, that all London,

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except three millions, was out of town. This remark is due to September: it is the tribute of the season and must be rendered every year. I know not when it was first discovered. I have been able to trace it back as far as the autumn of the year 1808, when Margate was crowded and Brighton overflowed, and all London, except a million, was out of town. No doubt it began much earlier, but my humble researches have not traced it farther back. When the wags and the wits of the Forties used it, they altered the million to a million and a half. Twenty years ago it became two millions—it is now three. All London, except three millions, was out of town. The streets of Bond, Regent and Piccadilly presented to gilded youth—such as was left—an appearance of desolation complete: there were no carriages, and the shops, to those who remembered the season, had a faded and jaded look. Yet the streets were full of people: among them not a few country damsels who took London at the end

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of their August holiday, girls as bright and almost as good to look at as Althea herself, refreshing to the soul with their beauty, their youth, and their eagerness and curiosity.

Laurence walked beside Althea, Cassie generally a little behind. With her straw hat, her blue dress and her sunny face, Althea looked as if she had come straight from green fields, babbling brooks and shady woods. This was the reward conferred by Father Thames upon one who loved him long and steadily, constant even through the fogs of autumn, the biting East-winds of spring and the thunder-storms of July. The young man felt that pride in his mistress which is one of the fairest jewels of love. All the world, he thought, must be ready to worship her. Where was the meanness of the place in which she was born and had been brought up? Was it not able to tarnish ever so little the beauty and brightness of this fair creature? External meanness, my friends, has no more

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to do with the root of the matter than the frame has to do with the picture. What matter for the squalid streets if they were peopled by the girl with the noble figures of the past? What matter for the rough folk around her if the house within echoed with the great words and the sweet songs of the Poets and Makers? What matter for the sordid lives around her if this girl's soul was lifted high above them? No touch of the meanness clung to her.

They made slow way down the street of shops, because even at the faded and jaded time there is always so great and splendid an exhibition.

'Oh, but you have seen it all before,' said the girl, looking up from a dream of lovely colours. 'It is a shame to keep you here so long.'

'No: we are come here expressly for you to see it. I am happy only in looking on,' said Laurence, softly.

'It is all so beautiful,' she said. 'The

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people so well-dressed: the broad streets: and the splendour of the shops——'

'You like everything,' he replied. 'You are at present uncritical. The time will come when you will be less easily pleased.'

'Yes: I like everything—the dresses and the bonnets. Look, Cassie, at that lovely costume—and the glove shops—and—oh! look at these things in brass—and the peaches and grapes. There is only one thing I do not like——'

'What is that?'

'The rows and rows of photographs of girls—who can they be that can bear to have their likenesses exposed for everybody to see?'

'They like it,' said Cassie from professional experience. 'The more people look at them the better they like it.'

'Now that you have been slowly down the street,' said Laurence, 'you must let me take you to a place where we can get some of the pretty things you have admired.'

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No one will understand how two girls could have arrived at the age of twenty without ever going a-shopping. Yet it was most true. One of them, you see, had hardly ever seen a shop, and the other had never been able for lack of money to use the shops as their proprietors most desire. You cannot go shopping with a shilling.

Laurence took them to a very fine establishment at the lower end of Regent Street, where they were received by a gentleman of extraordinary politeness, who offered them chairs and called a most good-natured and obliging young man who made nothing of showing them all kinds of beautiful things. They admired so many things that when they came away there was an immense heap of gloves, neckties, handkerchiefs, ruffs, bottles of eau-de-Cologne, lace, glove-boxes, handkerchief-boxes, and no one knows what pretty things besides, all lying piled on the counter. And they were so much occupied that they did not observe how Laurence received a certain

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document, returned it with two crisp rustling pieces of paper, and wrote an address on a card.

Then they went into Piccadilly and from Piccadilly into Bond Street. There this young man took them into another shop. It was not in the least like the shop they had just left; within there was a place like a professional man's consulting-room, and outside nothing in the window but a diamond spray and parure on a red velvet cushion. They were received by a thoughtful person who appeared to be benevolent in intention. Laurence explained that he had two or three things to buy for his mother, and begged Althea to assist him with her taste in the selection. The things consisted of a bracelet, a necklace, and a ring, and they were all three set with emeralds.

'Next,' he said, 'I have to get a watch and chain. Will you choose them, Cassie, for me? Just, you know, the kind of watch and chain which you would like for yourself.'

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When Cassie had chosen one, he threw the chain round her neck.

'It was for yourself,' he said.

The girl's eyes dimmed with the tearful sense of kindness. As for the necklace and the ring and the bracelet, he put them all into his pocket and came away without giving anything at all to Althea, which seemed to Cassie just a little disappointing.

For one thing this young man must be envied and admired. Whenever he went into Shopland, where there was a chance of meeting young ladies of his acquaintance, he always carried a pocketful of money, just as great men and rich merchants of the last Century were never without long purses filled at both ends with guineas. In these degenerate days a highwayman on Hounslow Heath would get nothing but a leather purse with two or three pounds in it and perhaps a Waterbury watch with a steel chain—not worth the trouble of a 'Stand and Deliver.' Formerly, a gentleman's purse was always

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good for fifty guineas at least. When Lord Nelson went into action in Trafalgar Bay, he carried ninety guineas in his pocket, to meet, I suppose, the casual expenses—the petty cash —of the action. It was a good old custom and it deserves to be revived, if only to give young men the opportunity of realising the purest and most innocent pleasure in the world —that of making a girl happy for the moment with the possession of a pretty thing.

'What shall we see next?' Laurence asked.

'If you are not tired,' said Althea, 'let us go to a picture gallery.'

They went to the National Gallery, the Art collection where the Art-Critics and the artistic and the æsthetic people are never seen. This afternoon they had it all to themselves, save for the hapless painters who hang about the Gallery in hopes of getting a commission to copy. The artistic training of all three, it must be owned, wanted finish. As for the young man, he came from the City of Sydney

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whither there go, I believe, every year many fine pictures: at the same time the young gentlemen of Sydney, in matters of art, do not consider themselves as having quite the same advantages as those of London. This being so, it is not wonderful if the three artlessly regarded all the pictures alike from the story-telling point of view. Exactly the same thing may be observed every year in the Royal Academy, because many of the most enthusiastic followers of Art have never got beyond the story-telling point of view. For enjoyment, they probably found as much in the Gallery as the finest Critic there. There are many pictures in the National Collection which tell really beautiful stories, and these, particularly where the colours had not quite faded, gave the girls a new sense of delight. When no story was told they passed over the picture without reference to the painter even if it were Raffaelle himself. Cassie, as became a person professionally acquainted with the great Mystery of Photography, with Carte or

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Cabinet, Plain or Coloured, perhaps allowed herself some small airs of superiority.

'It has all been beautiful,' Althea cried as they came out and stood under the porch looking out upon the Square. 'It is wonderful. Come, Cassie, we will go home. Thank you, Mr. Waller, you must let us find our own way home.'

'Indeed,' said Laurence, 'we have not nearly finished. There is a great deal more to be done. Why, we must have dinner to begin with.'

The girls laughed and yielded. They had already dined, as we have seen, off cold mutton and apples and cream. But who could resist this masterful young man?

He took them to a restaurant, one of the quiet kind, as you go up Regent Street on the left hand. There he ordered such a dinner as had never before entered into the imagination of either. These poor girls had never really dined—you cannot dine in the middle of the day: you may eat pleasantly, as you may stoke

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the engine with necessary fuel, but you cannot dine. Then again, these girls had never before been inside a restaurant, and it is very well-known that there are few things which country girls, and those who have lived in suburban retirement, more ardently love than a dinner at a restaurant of the brighter kind. As for girls not liking an artistic dinner, that is the nonsense of the old sentimental kind, when they were supposed to eat nothing. At home, it is true, they never get an artistic dinner; a leg of mutton well hung and well roasted with an Apple Charlotte to follow is the best dinner they ever get: and a pretentious dinner-party with a succession of ill-made dishes is their worst: but a truly artistic, æsthetic, beautiful dinner they never have the chance of getting except at a restaurant. The pretty little dishes: the unexpected discoveries: the daintiness of the serving: the things of which they had read, such as mushrooms and olives, now exhibited for the first time: the green things not piled up in great china bowls as at

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home, but in little dishes tenderly and lovingly as if they were things precious, as indeed they are: the *gâteaux* and puddings, the creams and jellies and ices: the glass of champagne that so sweetly fills the brain—all these things helped to make this dinner joyous. And they all three laughed at nothing and talked merrily and were as happy as youth and everything that youth most desires could make them. It was the happiness which disappears and becomes impossible after five-and-twenty, to all the world except to those who linger and worship in the Courts of the Temple of Art—and they never grow old or lose this power of joy because they never cease to live with the young.

It was eight o'clock when the head-waiter brought coffee and the bill. If the girls had seen the addition and realised the sum of money gone to make that little feast they would have been smitten with remorse. But they did not see.

Outside, another cab was waiting them.

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This time, indeed, they thought they were going home. But no: the cab stopped before a brilliantly lighted portal and Laurence sprang out.

'It is only a quarter-past eight,' he said, 'we are in very good time.'

The girls were passive now. They got out and followed him.

It was a theatre, and neither of them had ever been at the play before.

Laurence took them to a box where they sat speechless except between the Acts. Oh! The acted story—how wonderful it was! Oh! The heroine how sweet and the lover how tender and the villain—oh! the villain!—Some people might criticise the acting and the dialogue; these two saw nothing but the story. In a box opposite sat the author who had dropped in, having nothing else to do, and found interest enough in watching the two girls on the other side who never took their eyes off the stage and showed in their faces the play of the passions which he had created.

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Then he went home in a rapture and proudly said to himself, '*Ipse feci!*'

At half-past eleven they reached the house in New Thames Street.

Cassie said good-night and walked on, perhaps with intention, perhaps because it was really too late to be lingering on the doorstep.

'You have had a pleasant day?' asked Laurence, holding Althea's hand for a moment.

'Yes—yes—Oh, a most delightful day.'

'Althea,' he whispered, 'tell me, are you —are you engaged to Oliver Luttrell?'

'No—no—no.' She snatched away her hand and ran into the house before he could say another word.

'There are some days, Cassie,' said Laurence, 'which can never be forgotten. This is one of them.'

They were alone, because everybody else was in bed and he was taking the refreshment of tobacco and a potash.

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'I can never forget it. Nor can Althea. And oh! Mr. Waller, why did you give me this lovely watch?'

'I will tell you why before long. You think Althea was happy?'

'I am sure she was. How could she help being happy? Oh! It was like a dream.—And it is all over! And I am a photographer's girl again looking out for another place—And you will go away again and then we shall be ten times as dull and dreary as we were before you came. But Oh!'—she laid her hand upon his—'what does it matter about us, Mr. Waller, if only you and Althea go away together!'

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE DAY AFTER

If Laurence went again the next morning to the Poet's study, which cannot be denied, it was by special invitation—say, command—of the Master. It must not be thought that he haunted the place. To be sure, he lingered long after he had paid his daily tribute of generous appreciation; and that was in a laudable hope of finding an opportunity for seeing and talking with Althea. He had lost a most beautiful chance that last night had given him—your true lover is always finding and losing and finding again such opportunities, for the mood must suit the time and the occasion must find the mind ready: and he who most truly loves finds it the hardest

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to speak and sometimes the maiden runs away. But the God who provides the opportunity takes long to forgive when one is thrown away. Laurence had to go at last without seeing his mistress. Thus he was punished: and thus for a few days more Love continued to punish him.

Althea was, in fact, all the morning in her own room. She was on the stairs about to descend when she heard her lover's footstep. Then she ran back and stood unseen upon the landing, and listened while he walked into the study and greeted her father. She blushed because she knew very well that he was come in the hope of seeing her—however great might be his admiration of her father's genius: she trembled because she knew what he wanted to say to her and because she still felt the warm pressure of his hand, and heard his voice, soft and sweet. She sat down and listened. The whole morning through she sat listening; from the room below came up the cadenced droning of her father's voice,

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while he read his poems: once or twice there was an interruption—a word or two—from his companion. Then the sing-song of the voice began again. All the morning through: and she had no desire to do anything: she did not tire, listening and thinking, and waiting. She sat quite still, her hands in her lap, with the gracious smile upon her lips, and the serious light in her eyes, which belong to woman at her best. The effect of the smiling lip and the serious eye has never yet, so far as I know, been produced by mere man. If the masculine person is happy, he laughs: if he is quite young or yet but half civilised, he laughs and capers and sings: he even ties on a horse's tail and claps horns on his head and takes a double flute, and in the guise of a Satyr, dances round an Etruscan Vase. But the Woman who has made him happy, looks on with serious eyes and smiling lips.

When Laurence at length departed, Althea opened her door and went downstairs, her face composed and grave: nor could any one guess

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the tumult and the joy that filled her soul because now she knew indeed that she was loved and because she was ready to give her lover all he asked, her heart, her thoughts, her life, her very soul. Her father, thinking that all these things were his own and going to remain his own—such is the fondness of a parent and so great is the selfishness of man—informed her that he had passed a delightful morning, and that his friend, Mr. Waller, really seemed as if he could not keep away from that Temple of the Muse—'And yet, my dear, with so profound a love for poetry, he lacks entirely, he tells me, the power of poetic expression. It is, indeed, surprising!'

Laurence wondered where she could be: when he left the Poet he looked into the opposite room—Althea's work-box stood on the table but she was not there. She was perhaps on the river. But no: the tide was at its lowest: her boat lay wretched, ashamed, self-conscious upon the mud. Was she by chance sitting with Cassie? No, Cassie was

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sitting by herself, her head in her hands, abandoned to melancholy reflections and the natural flatness of things after a day of festivity.

Before her on the table lay the 'things' which had now arrived: there they were—the lovely chiffons, the gloves and the glove-boxes and the bottles of scent,—yet they failed to bring her comfort. Girls may amuse themselves with gauds at times: yet they know very well that after all there is but one thing in the world which is of real importance. And that had nothing to do with the pile of pretty things upon the table.

'Oh, Mr. Waller,' she cried, 'to think that you have bought all these things!'

'They are for Althea and for you. But you will give Flavia some of them.'

'If I had had them a month ago they would have made me happy. But now——'

'Now, Cassie, you have learned that the world is much wider than it seemed, and you have observed that it contains many thousands of young men——'

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'Oh!' she cried, 'you don't know. How should you know?'

It was a cry of pain. So Ariadne might have wept over the beads which came too late to please her.

'If such things could make you happy, Cassie,' said Laurence. 'You should have the whole shopfull.'

She shook her head mournfully. Observe that with her sister Flavia she still carried herself with an affectation of having nothing on her mind. She would not confess to the companion of her whole life, from whom she had never been separated; but to this young man, this stranger, she told all. And yet he did not love her nor did he pretend to love her. Perhaps a girl may find it easier to confess to a man than to another woman: men are always ready to judge a woman kindly and are quick to find excuses for her. Perhaps there was a certain sympathetic power in this young man which made him fraternal.

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He stood over her, looking down with eyes of pity.

'Cassie, my child,' he said. 'The other girl—the one who was tricked so infamously, you know, by a wretch—directly she understood what an amazing Wretch he really was, shook him out of her heart, just as she might have shaken a viper off her dress. Then she went her own way and presently began to sing again just as if nothing had happened.'

'Oh! you don't know,' she repeated.

'To be sure, she went quite away from him—a long way off—where she would never see him again and never hear anything more about him or be reminded of him.'

'Oh! To go right away—never to be reminded any more!'

'Yes—would you like to go away?'

'If I should like! But it is no use. And besides how could I leave everybody—Althea and all?'

'Ah! How to leave Althea? well—courage—and a little patience yet. Courage!

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I feel almost as if my Christian name was Claudius. Shall I prophesy a little? But no: best wait a little.'

He left her and walked away. His wandering steps led him round about the streets of Poet and Player Land where Althea had walked with him. She was with him still in imagination. He heard her voice 'Here is the Bear Garden: this is the famous Rose Theatre and here is the Globe where they are playing "Macbeth" this very hour.' Presently, having been in a dream, he awoke and found himself in the Bridge Road and opposite the house which bore outside the announcement that J. Mayes had succeeded S. Norbery. He remembered his promise to call again and he knocked at the office-door.

Mr. Mayes was, as usual, engaged in casting up accounts with the assistance of a fat fore-finger.

'Oh!' he said looking up. 'It's you, is it? You're the young gentleman from

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Australia. Well, sir, and what might you be wanting now?'

'I have merely looked in, Mr. Mayes, as I promised, just to ask how you are getting on with that search—after the will, you know, that you signed thirty years ago.'

'Eight years ago, you mean.'

'No, thirty years ago, if you please.'

Observe that by continually reading the will, repeating the dates, and observing the circumstances as they must have happened, coupled with electric treatment, Mr. Mayes thought himself gradually arriving at a distant recollection of the events. The outlines of his picture were a little blurred and the whole thing had still a tendency to become a dissolving view. Now at the reminder of that other event which he remembered without any blurring of outline at all, the imaginary picture dissolved immediately and Mr. Mayes fell back into that quagmire of bewilderment from which he thought he was gradually lifting himself.

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'I say eight years,' he repeated. But he grew red in the face. 'What do you know about it? What's the good of talking to you about it?'

'I see. If you had found the paper you would have told me. Go on looking for it.'

'Perhaps I've found something a good deal more important, Mister. But that's my business. If you've nothing more to say——'

'Nothing more.'

'Then, Sir, you needn't waste my time any longer. My time is my money.'

'Pity then, that there are only twenty-four hours of money to spend. Good morning, Mr. Mayes.'

Laurence crossed the Bridge slowly, with the faint hope that he might meet Althea upon it. But she was not there. He looked down upon Thames Street: perhaps she was on her way to or from St. Leonard le Size. The street was very full of people all rushing about and the air was darkened by bales and casks being hoisted to the upper floors of ware-

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houses; but he could not see Althea anywhere. In fact she was at that moment sitting at the early dinner with her father and her uncle, graciously dispensing with liberal hand an autumnal plum pie, which moderns weakly call plum tart.

The baffled lover turned his steps westward, and walked through the City. When he got into Fleet Street he remembered the very remarkable reception or ovation accorded to the Poet. And in order to clear up a certain suspicion he bought a Sporting Paper. Yes: it was as he suspected. The Poet was indeed a popular favourite—the youth of New South Wales are not altogether to seek in the matter of sport—no more popular favourite had been known for many years. Yet Mr. Indagine had hastily jumped to a conclusion not warranted by the facts. For, in fact, the excitement was caused by an approaching event in which Fleet Street was interested from one end to the other, with every lane, court, alley, printing-press and newspaper

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office. In this event the Poet was to play a part: and the event was a duello: and the Poet was the descriptive name by which the favourite was known: and professionally he was a prize-fighter.

This point cleared up, Laurence drove to the Club of which he was a temporary member, and sat there all the afternoon, writing to his mother a faithful account of most that had passed—not all, because a young man cannot tell everything to his mother—not even if he is a Frenchman. And, as regards Althea in connection with the winged boy, Laurence as yet preserved silence.

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CHAPTER XXIV

CLAUDIA AND FLAVIA

In the evening he remembered Claudia's invitation. The Prophetess lived in a small house near her own chapel—that is to say, in Union Street. Her house was distinguished from the rest in the daytime partly by the fact that it is the only private house—the rest being shops—and partly by its cleanliness, its fresh bright paint, the boxes of flowers in the windows, and the white doorstep. How could one who prophesies present so dingy an exterior as her more obscure neighbours? If one is only a workman employed in Barclay and Perkins', and is not specially distinguished by gifts spiritual, and never goes to Church or Chapel at all, it matters very little if the

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landlord does refuse to paint the house, and if the doorstep continues black. Indeed, although so excellent an example is offered in Redcross Street close by, it must be confessed that æsthetically Union Street is still far, very far, behind Bedford Park. The door was opened by a neat little maid in the whitest of caps and aprons. She was a member of the congregation, and she thought it the highest privilege in the world to be allowed to work for the Prophetess, Sister Claudia, and a cause for laudable pride and uplifting. She might, also, have piqued herself, had she chosen, upon being the only servant in the whole of the street, and of many adjacent streets, but this kind of pride—pride statistical—tempted her not. Mostly she watched her mistress and anticipated her wants, made her tea strong and served her toast hot, kept her things tidy and the house clean: listened to her in Chapel and wondered how it was done, and hoped that she herself might some day—but that was the hope common to all the sisters of the

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Early Church. If one woman be so gifted, why not others?

The girl received Laurence as if she knew and expected him.

'You are Mr. Waller,' she whispered, admitting him, and closing the door noiselessly. 'Of course Sister Claudia knew you were coming. This way. She is in her own room.'

The narrow passage was covered with a thick carpet, which made their footsteps noiseless: the house seemed profoundly silent: a lamp stood on a bracket with a coloured shade over it, which lent an unreal and mysterious light. Laurence began to feel as if he were being conducted to the shrine of Apollo's own Prophetess by an attendant Virgin, one of those who surrounded the Oracle and laid flowers upon the altar.

The girl gently opened the door of what, in former days, would have been called the back parlour, and lifted a heavy curtain which hung across it within, motioning to Laurence. He obeyed and entered.

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He found himself in a room which, to begin with, was full of flowers. Flowers were in vases on the mantelshelf and on the table and on the low bookcase. The air was heavy with their perfume. The room was furnished with a sofa, an easy chair, and three or four ordinary chairs; a large Bible lay open on the table: heavy curtains hung across the window and the door: there was a fire in the grate though the evening was not cold: and Sister Claudia sat in the easy chair beside it.

Among the Brethren it was well known that those who sat in Sister Claudia's room began presently to experience many singular sensations. Their experience differed. Some of them were contented to feel their heads go round: others declared that they lost themselves altogether, and were rapt in visions, seeing things ineffable: others, again, heard voices whispering words of infinite comfort and joy unspeakable, but no one could remember, afterwards, what they were: others declared that the hearts of true believers

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glowed within them while they sat in that room: and some there were who testified that they had even been moved by the influence of the place and the presence of the Prophetess to repent and to confess their sins on the spot. One thing at least was certain: that the room was always full of flowers, and that there was always a fire burning, and that the air was always that of the hottest room in a conservatory of tropical plants.

As for Laurence, he found the atmosphere so hot and heavy, that while Sister Claudia was greeting him and pressing his hands, he felt dizzy and faint. The little sweet-voiced woman in the black silk dress, who murmured so gracious a welcome in a musical whisper, seemed as if she and her room and her voice and all belonged to a dream.

'Cousin Laurence,' she said, 'I knew you would come to-night. Not by any gift or vision. Not at all. I claim nothing of that kind, you understand. Felix—you know that great son of mine—told me you had

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come back—and I said to myself "He will spend the first day with his friends in New Thames Street and he will call on me the day after." I was right. Sit down—the room makes you a little giddy, perhaps. That is because I always like my room warm. And the scent of the flowers is heavy. Sit down. It will pass away.'

The giddiness did pass in a few moments. When Laurence came to himself Claudia was murmuring pleasantly—what had she been talking about? And she was laughing softly and musically—a cheerful sympathetic laugh, as one who has a feeling for youth and the world, and not in the least like one who is a recluse, a saintly abbess, or the Head of a Connection.

'I knew that you would come, Laurence—I shall call you Laurence, just as if I had known you all my life—let me look at you again. I have only seen you once before, you know, when you came to the Chapel with Flavia. Yes—yes—you are Lucy's child

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You have her eyes—but they are more like Florry's: and her mouth—yet that is more like Florry's as well. But you are so tall—so tall. Lucy was a little woman. All the women in our family are little. And look at my great giant of a son. Why he is bigger than you. And how is my cousin Lucy after all these years?'

'She was very well when I heard by the last mail. My father, you know, has greatly prospered and we are rich people.'

'Lucy rich!' she laughed pleasantly. 'Oh! poor Lucy—what a change from the old days! Lucy rich and dressed in silks and everything, with her own servants! I can hardly understand it. Well, I am very glad. You shall tell me all about it. I am very glad. Tell her, Laurence, that I said so. I was never a party to the coolness. It was all Cornelia's doing. She took a huff because she thought Lucy should not have gone to Mr. Norbery without consulting us.'

'Oh!' said Laurence, 'it was ever so long

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ago. Surely it must be forgotten by this time.'

The wise woman shook her head.

'You don't know the world,' she said. 'You are young. Cousins and sisters don't forget slights. We never spoke to Lucy after that, and when she married we were not even told of it, let alone being invited to the wedding, which we had no right to expect and no call to complain about, as I always told Cornelia.'

'I am sure my mother has long since forgotten——'

'All I can say is that after the way Cornelia behaved to your mother I was surprised—I was indeed—when I heard that you'd gone to stay in the very house. I thought she would have had more spirit. Quite surprised I was.'

This familiar talk, in such a place which only wanted an altar, a pot of incense and a tripod or so to make it a most beautiful *cella* or innermost sanctuary, struck Laurence with

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a sense of incongruity. But even a Prophetess must have some sort of social position to begin with, and when Claudia was a girl a great deal of family conversation turned upon the behaviour of their cousins and their friends. Few of them, in her circle, consistently lived up to the lofty standard required by Vicesimus Cottle. In such cases it was due to Cornelia, the eldest daughter, rather than to Claudia, to let them know and feel the reality and consequences of their backslidings. Therefore Lucy's sins, whatever they had been, were followed and punished by a coolness.

'So Lucy has done well. To look at you it is pretty certain that she has done well. I am very glad. Does she ever talk about us and the Bank and old times?'

'She told me to seek out my cousins and to do for them anything I could, provided they want any help. As you know, I have not yet told them who I am.'

'It was kind of Lucy. But she always

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had the best heart in the world. Dear me! Lucy! Florry! It seems like yesterday when we were all young together. Lucy and Florry! How pretty they were, both of them! Oh, my dear boy, if I could only show you that pretty pair as they were when they were eighteen and nineteen. But there! A son can never know what his mother was like when she was young. It is a sad thing for her to think of when she is old and has lost her beauty. Florry was the prettier of the two, according to some—of course we shall be beautiful again in the world to come. But yet—Florry wasn't so serious and so steady as her sister, though she certainly was prettier. Poor Florry! Poor dear Florry!'

'What became of her?'

'I don't know,' Claudia replied shortly. 'Don't ask me. If any one knows it's Cornelia. Julia was fondest of Lucy, but Florry was my favourite, poor thing! And now we are all old women. I am past fifty now, and so is your mother—and—' the tears

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came into her eyes. 'The sight of you brings back the old times, my dear boy. You are so handsome and so tall, and you are so like your Aunt Florry though she was so little. Well—you came to find us out and to offer us help if we wanted it.' She took his hand again and pressed it in motherly fashion. 'As for me I want no help. My people keep me. Though we are not rich, we share what we have and it is enough. But on the Bank I am afraid they will be soon in sad straits. My brother Lucius cannot find another place: it was a thousand pities that he was not brought up to something—but the Academy fell off sadly towards the end: all the respectable boys went to St. Olave's and St. Saviour's —and there was no money. And Cassie has lost her place, too. How they are all going to live I cannot tell. If they have to sell the house it will be like parting with all the history and the dignity of the Family. That would be dreadful, and we have been so respectable, Laurence,' she added pathetically. 'We have,

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indeed. Nobody was ever more looked up to than my father and your great-uncle.'

'I hope they will not have to sell the house. We will consider and do what we can. I will consult you.'

'Thank you, Laurence. You are so strong and tall that it makes one feel you are able to do everything. And now I do want your help—for Felix—for my son.'

'I have already had a long talk with Felix. He wants to go to Australia.'

'Yes, my poor boy is not happy. I thought it was a good thing for him when he got into the Accountant's Department of the Brewery, but he doesn't like desk work. I tell him he can't be always running races and playing football. He wants an outdoor life.'

'Perhaps my father could help him to that.'

'Then he frets because of Cassie. The poor boy has been in love with his cousin all his life. He used to call her his wife when they were only little things. And she is a

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pretty girl, isn't she? I was like her once. Oh! I don't wonder at it. Boys are so. And he frets because of the Chapel. He will never have a right feeling for the Connection unless he goes away, when perhaps he may remember it. He likes St. Saviour's better although his mother has taken the place she now holds.' The mother sighed. The Prophetess sat up and smiled with conscious pride. It was indeed a unique position which she occupied. 'Take him away with you, Laurence. I will let him go willingly, even if I never see him again, so long as it is for his own good. If he stays here, what with his rage against the young man who has behaved so villainously, and his galling office work, there will be mischief done.'

'He shall go with me, if he likes,' said Laurence. 'My father will find something for him to do.'

'As for that young man—evil will fall upon him: judgment will overtake him: remember that. Be surprised at nothing. But

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remember I told you that the ungodly should fall into the trap that he had laid for others.'

Then she fell to talking quite freely and naturally about her boy and of what could be made of him and how he was the best of sons, though not as yet converted, and of what a splendid success he would make of life if he only had a fair start and so forth, the Prophetess being entirely lost for the moment. But while she spoke other voices were heard outside the door and the curtain was pulled aside, and Flavia appeared holding by the hand—in fact dragging by the hand—the Chevalier.

'You here, Mr. Waller?' she cried in astonishment. 'But never mind. I don't care if all the world knows, though I thought I would tell Aunt Claudia first.'

'What has happened, Flavia? Don't tell me that you have lost your place as well as your sister.'

'No, I haven't, Aunt. My place is my

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own and I mean to keep it. Aunt Claudia, I can't stand it any longer.'

'Well, Flavia?'

'Oh,' she replied breathlessly, 'I have told him what I think, and though I've had a world of trouble to persuade him to it he's come round at last and I've brought him here to talk it over with you.'

The Chevalier bowed his head gravely. Then he took Flavia's hand and raised it to his lips, with the politeness expected of his rank. As for the girl her flushed cheek and bright eyes clearly showed that something quite unusual had happened. Whatever it was it beautified her. She was carried out of herself: she no longer had the air of conscious propriety which generally reminded one of her Aunt Cornelia.

'Oh! Chevalier,' she murmured out of a full heart. Then, flashing into a spirit which no one would ever have suspected of her—'Aunt Claudia! I declare there isn't such a good man in all the world as the

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Chevalier. No—there isn't, and there isn't a man in the world so put upon and ill-treated. He has been made a slave—yes, a slave—a white slave—by that Wretch who pretends that he is his clerk, and isn't fit to black the Chevalier's boots. The man makes him sweep out the office: he makes him, actually as if he was a General at ten pounds a year, buy the food and cook it: yes, he makes him get ready breakfast, dinner and supper with his own hands—the Chevalier! Think of it! And all the rest of the time the Wretch makes him work at the desk. And no pay at all—or next to none. Nothing but his keep. And look at his clothes! They are in rags. He hasn't got but two pairs of socks and not a whole shirt left, and he has to make his own cloth shoes because he can't afford to buy a new p'r o' boots. Oh! The poor Chevalier!'

'Well, my dear?' asked Claudia quietly.

'Aunt Claudia,' she took breath and considered a moment, 'I thought the Connection would have interfered. But they are too poor.

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I've spoke to Brother Matthias and Sister Tabitha, but they both say the Connection is too poor. So I just resolved with myself what to do.'

'What is it?'

'I think I can guess,' said Laurence quietly.

'He's a man who ought to have a lecture room of his own to speak in. He is brimful and bursting with the message that is in him. Oh! Aunty, even you yourself on a Sunday evening haven't got a more splendid message to deliver.' The Chevalier shook his head gravely, but whether in denial or not is not known. 'For it is not only the Gospel of Love—you taught him that—but the Gospel of Love applied to life—to all our lives and to all the work of the world. Not only to saving our own souls, but to altering the whole world. You must hear him talk. He is nothing better than a prisoner now. And he is old. If he is kept in his prison much longer he will die. If we set him free he will live a great many years perhaps and deliver his message.'

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'Yes,' said Claudia, thoughtfully. 'If he really has such a message. But many brethren and sisters too have come to me declaring that they have a Message to deliver and they hadn't, my dear. They had nothing but the desire to have a Message. Chevalier, what have you to tell us?'

The Chevalier lifted his head and raised his hand. Then he spoke solemnly. 'I have to preach the Equality of Christian Love. Not as you preach it, Sister Claudia, for the spiritual benefit of the brethren, but for the material happiness of the whole world. I have to make mankind love each other, not only for the sake of their Heavenly Lord, but also for the sake of their brotherhood. Then all injustice will cease, all self-seeking and oppressions. You show us how to save our souls, as Flavia said. I will show the world how to save their lives—by Christian love, by brotherly love. I shall take the doctrine of the Early Church out into the world and teach it over again to all mankind. We are all

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equals: we are all brothers: there is none greater and none less among us. Sister Claudia, I will set open your doors; I will break down the walls of your little chapel: I will give to all the world what you have given to the Connection.'

'It is well spoken,' said Sister Claudia, watching him with eyes that looked full of fire in the crimson light of the lamp.

'I dreamed, at first, of lecturing on Humanity and its Rights. But I now see that I was providentially restrained. I must preach, not lecture. I must be an Apostle, not a Professor. It is by Apostles that the cause is advanced, and an Apostle may be a martyr.'

'You gave me your card once, Chevalier,' said Laurence. 'I had forgotten it. I will find you a Hall to begin with if you please.'

But the Chevalier paid no attention to this interruption. 'The Time has come,' he said, 'and the Means. As for the Means, Flavia has told you. I would not at first consent, for she

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is twenty and I am seventy. There seemed too great a difference between us.'

'He is only forty-nine years and nine months and twenty days older than me,' said Flavia. 'Difference? Nonsense! What's that?'

'A girl, then, has been found—gracious, self-sacrificing, noble—who will set me free.'

'I am going to marry him,' said Flavia, calmly. 'It is the only way out of it. I've got twenty-five shillings a week: we shall make it enough. He is the most frugal of men and the kindest heart as well as the noblest. But I don't know what father will say.'

'What do you say, Chevalier?'

'What can I say?' Tears stood in the nobleman's eyes. 'She finds me in a prison: she offers to let me out: she finds me full of my message: she enables me to deliver it: she is young and I am old: my time for Love is over, yet she brings me Love: she sacrifices herself to me. What can I say? What do you expect me to say?'

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Claudia looked at Laurence. There were questions in her eyes.

'Yes,' he said, rising. 'I will leave these lovers with you, Sister Claudia. Perhaps they could do no better. Flavia, you understand what you are doing. Yes, I am sure you do. You will make this good man happy. I do not think that you will ever repent your sacrifice.' Then he laughed lightly. 'When you are the wife of the Chevalier what shall we have to call you?'

'I shall not take my husband's title,' said Flavia of the Telegraph Department. 'I have made up my mind to remain simple Mrs. De Heyn. In the Early Church, Aunt Claudia, they dropped their titles.'

'I came to London on a holiday,' Laurence addressed himself an hour later, to the Shade of Vicesimus in the Best Bed Room. 'I was told to find out my cousins, and learn what they were doing. I have now got a family, a whole family, a most interesting family upon

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my hands, and I hope my mother will be satisfied and pleased. I have also found,' he paused and smoked in meditation for a while, watching the smoke curling in the air, 'and I hope,' he added, not finishing his sentence, 'that my mother will be pleased with that as well.'

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CHAPTER XXV

AN INCREASE TO THE FAMILY

It was a singular circumstance that all the misfortunes of this very respectable family should arrive together, like a troop of comedians, and that at the very time of the unknown cousin's arrival. Consider. Before he came Lucius was happy in the possession of his Guarantee, though business was deplorable. Cassie rejoiced in the possession of a lover and of a place where her conduct and her pleasing manners gave every satisfaction. Flavia had not assumed the sole responsible charge of an elderly philanthropist. Nay, more. Oliver had not been tempted: consequently, he had not fallen. To fall, without being tempted, argues depravity. Althea,

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happy girl, was still fancy free and could go forth to watch her ghosts upon the river and the river bank. Felix, even though he loved his cousin, was not consumed with wrath on her account, and if he disliked his work, did his best to conceal that dislike. And as for Mr. Mayes he was still able to remember the witnessing of Mr. Norbery's Will thirty years ago without the intrusion of that vacant space where another group should have been. Those who believe in the Evil Eye might have strengthened their faith by a consideration of this case.

The family, large and interesting as it was, became, as you will now see, larger and much more interesting. Nobody, in fact, can quite understand the extent of his own family, especially in that great class called the Middle, to which most of us have the honour of belonging. If one begins working backwards and sidewards, vertically and horizontally, quite surprising results may be obtained. A Milk Walk, a Baptist Chapel, a Board School,

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a grocer's shop say at Old Ford, a Company in a Line Regiment, a blacksmith's forge, a Bishop's wife, may be sprung upon the Family Tree when a member of the Middle Class begins to investigate. For the Middle Class is not only the backbone of the country but also the legs and the ribs and the shoulders of it, and is intimately connected with the toes and the heels and the ankle joints of it. Therefore the discovery which Laurence was about to make, though it might be romantic, could not be called wonderful. The only wonderful thing about it was the coincidence of its happening the very day after a certain conversation. One who writes a novel would hesitate to introduce such a coincidence, but the plain historian may safely venture to do so because in daily life they happen continually.

Think. At breakfast you have been talking of a man, a woman, or a subject. After breakfast you put on your hat and walk abroad upon your daily business among the

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haunts of men. Presently something happens to you directly concerned with that man, that woman, or that subject. You go home in the evening and you tell the story, beginning with the formula, 'Most remarkable coincidence! We were talking of Jack Scallawag this very morning, saying that it was ages since we heard what had become of him. When I got into town, there he was at my office, and wanted to borrow ten pounds —confound him! He didn't get it: but—most remarkable coincidence!' It was therefore in no way remarkable, but only one of the natural incidents—the co-incidents—of everyday life, that the very person of whom Sister Claudia was talking in the evening should turn up in the morning.

Finding that Althèa sat resolutely in the study with her father, and resisted every hint that she should arise and go forth with him, Laurence gave it up, and wandered forth into the City, where he pleased himself by walking up one street and down another, lighting upon

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churches in unexpected corners, bits of churchyards, each as big as a dining-table, with tall warehouses round them, odd squares and closes, sometimes with a tree or a pump in them, winding lanes, merchants' houses, solid and substantial, dating from the Great Fire, towers standing all by themselves—there is one in Mark Lane which, if it were in some old French town, all the visitors would crowd to see: and another in Thames Street, without counting the fine old tower of Hackney—and all kinds of things, to the beauty of which Althea had educated his eye. He roamed in perfect happiness up and down Harp Lane, St. Mary-at-Hill, Rood Lane, Mincing Lane, Seething Lane, Crutched Friars, America Square, and the Minories. All these names he knew, and it pleased him to read them at the corners, and to connect them with their memories and the girl who had taught him all these curious things. Then he found himself in a labyrinth of streets whose names told him nothing—indeed there is nothing in the

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name of Mansell Street to suggest Goodman's Fields, or the old Theatre and David Garrick; Haydon Square has no history. Great Alie Street has, it is true, a certain strangeness of name which provokes curiosity—was Alie a girl—the toast of Whitechapel?—was there a Lesser Alie as well as Alie the Great? Prescott Street, also arrogating to itself the title of Great, does not point out the house where Cloudesley Shovel lived: nor does it record the fact that here the houses were first distinguished by numbers instead of signs. Civilisation, like religion, springs from the East and travels westward. Laurence was beginning to think that a cab would take him in half an hour to Club and Lunch land, and that he had perhaps done enough for one morning, and that this particular precinct was less interesting than some others, when he became aware of a woman going slowly along on the other side of the street. At first, he hardly remarked her—there are many poor women to be seen in this part of London.

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Next he became aware that he was somehow familiar with the figure. The woman was wretchedly clad—there are many women in London who are wretchedly clad: she crept along slowly, as if she was feeble: she hugged the houses as a ship may hug the shore. By her carriage, by her walk, by her miserable clothes, you could discern the depths of her poverty and wretchedness. There are, however, a great many wretchedly poor women in London; why did he seem to remember this woman?

She stopped: on a doorstep lay a thick crust of bread, flung there by some child who did not want it. She snatched it with eagerness and began ravenously to devour it. When she stooped, Laurence saw her face—a face thin and wan—he knew her then. It was the poor woman who had come out of the Church that morning when he visited Cornelia. Althea knew the woman. She was the Disgrace to the Family.

Then—he knew not why—a vague feeling

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of disquiet seized him—an unformed apprehension of he knew not what. He crossed the road swiftly, and accosted the poor creature.

'I have seen you before,' he said.

The woman looked up and shook her head.

'I do not remember you, sir.'

'You were coming out of St. Leonard's Church.'

'I go there sometimes.'

'You look in trouble. Can I help you?'

'Can you help me?' she repeated. 'Look at me——'

'Then,' said Laurence, 'let me help you.'

She spoke in a sweet low voice which reminded him of something—he knew not what. Her eyes, when she lifted them, were limpid and large—they made him think of Sister Claudia! her face was thin and wasted, but there were the traces, unmistakable, of bygone beauty upon her fine features. Her face presented none of the signs of degradation and drink which generally belong to persons in

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these truly melancholy circumstances. She was slight of stature and narrow in the shoulders—a little woman who in her youth might have been one of those fairy-like women who do so mightily rejoice the masculine eye, merely to see them walk or dance, only to hear them laugh and sing. As Laurence connected this poor creature with youth and beauty, he thought somehow first of Cassie and then of Sister Claudia.

'Miss Indagine knows you,' he said. 'You have at least one friend.'

'I had—But they turned me out of my room and now she does not know where to find me.'

'Why not tell her?'

'Because I am past her help. She has no money to give me. And besides it would only make her more unhappy. When last she came she was very unhappy.'

Were the very stones going to cry out upon this young man because he ran away?

'Where do you live?' he asked her.

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'I have found a room in Tenter Street. But I don't know how long I shall be able to keep it.'

'Will you take me to your room? At all events we could sit down and talk.'

'Sit down? In my room?' She laughed scornfully. Then she looked up quickly. 'You shall come,' she said. 'Oh, yes! you shall see my room. It will do you good to see my room. You are young and you are careless. You shall understand what misery means. It will do you good to see how we live—we who have nothing to wait and pray for but Death. And perhaps Death itself will make our fate no better. Come with me —you.' She lifted her head and quickened her step with the strength that comes of sudden passion. But it lasted no longer than a fire of shavings. Her head dropped, her feet dragged—she fell into her former carriage of patience—the patience of suffering, Laurence felt, as he looked down upon this poor bundle of rags, was even more pathetic than

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the short-lived flame of rage which had betrayed the misery of her soul. Why did she suffer so? What was her history? 'You are,' said Cornelia, 'the Disgrace of the Family.' What had this poor creature to do with the Family of Vicesimus Cottle, the great and respected Academician of Bank Side? And again a vague disquiet seized him, for he too was one of the Family.

'I live here,' said the woman. 'You can come upstairs with me if you please.'

She led the way up the stairs, dirty, broken, stripped of the banisters, to the second-floor back, a small room which at all events should have been light and airy. It was furnished with a kettle, a teapot and a teacup. Nothing more. Nothing at all. Some travellers have remarked upon the very small amount of personal luggage which is wanted to carry an Equatorial African through life—a pipe, a bow and arrows, a spear, a piece of cloth, perhaps a knife or an axe. Really, nothing more. But there are people

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in London who have reduced their wants to even smaller limits. A kettle, a teapot, a cup, a plate, a knife. Nothing more. These simple things completed the furniture of the whole room. There was nothing more—not even a bed, unless a heap of shavings in the corner made a bed: not a chair or a table—Nothing.

'You see,' said the tenant. 'This is where I live. Will you sit down and have a talk?'

'Good Heavens! Are you so poor as this? I thought that nobody——'

'I dare say there are not many quite so poor as myself,' she said. 'There cannot be many people in the world quite so poor as I am.'

'Poor? But you are destitute. You have nothing. Not even a bed to sleep upon.'

'Not even a bed,' she repeated. 'I am destitute.'

'And you live here—quite alone?'

'Quite alone. No one in the house knows

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me: no one ever comes here: I am quite alone in the world. At night it doesn't matter, because I can sleep; but in the day it is terrible to sit on the floor with nothing to do. Then I wander about the streets.'

'But how do you live?'

'Sometimes I get a little sewing to do—sacks and bags and things—I can work very well, but the work is hard to get—there are so many poor women who can sew—I should get on if I had regular work, because I can live on very little—oh! very little. For a week and more I haven't even had my cup of tea. I wonder if you understand what it is—not even to have a cup of tea—and I have lived upon bread. To-day I had not even any bread left and I should have eaten nothing, if I had not picked up a crust just now. Perhaps I shall pick up another crust by-and-bye. Sometimes there are lots of crusts lying about in the streets.'

'And to-morrow?'

'To-morrow—oh! but you are going to

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give me something,' she laughed—a soft and pleasant laugh—yet not mirthful—and it disquieted Laurence because it made him remember something—he knew not what.

'Yes, I will give you something. But the day after and the day after that?'

'Once a week I have a little piece of work for which I get a shilling. I clean and dust the church where Corn—the church of St. Leonard in Thames Street.'

'But you cannot live on a shilling a week.'

'This room is only two shillings a week—to be sure I am already in arrears, and if they could find another tenant they would turn me out very quickly. When I am turned out I do not know what will happen.'

'Have you no friends at all?'

'I have cousins, but I must not go to see them. And Althea Indagine was my friend, but I have lost her now because she does not know where to find me—no—I have no friends.'

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Laurence walked to the window and looked out upon the chimney-pots and the roofs.

'It is terrible,' he said presently, in husky accents. 'How can a woman fall into such dreadful poverty?'

'It is very easy,' she replied. 'Oh! you have no idea how very easy it is. I could show any girl the way. She has only to do exactly what I did, and in time she will fall into exactly the same misery.'

'What is your name? Tell me who you are.'

'Oh! my name—my name. The people in the house call me Mrs. Sinclair. Why not? It does as well as anything?'

'Where is your husband?'

'I have never had a husband.' She met his inquiring eyes with something like a blush and turned her head. 'No: I have never had a husband. But don't—oh! please don't tell Althea. Cornelia calls me the Disgrace of the Family. So I am. Yes—yes—I am a

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disgrace to any family, and mine was so respectable—oh, so respectable.'

'Who are you then?' cried Laurence, his cheeks suddenly burning with a dreadful thought. 'Tell me who you are.'

'You would not believe, would you?—that such a miserable thing could ever belong to a respectable family—well then'—but she stopped. 'I don't know who you are, Sir, I have promised Cornelia that I would never let my old friends know anything about me. You were with Althea Indagine—you don't know what mischief you might do.'

'Tell me quick,' cried Laurence. 'I swear that no mischief shall happen. Since I am a—a—friend of Althea you ought to trust me.'

'It is not mischief to me. It is disgrace to them.'

'Trust me,' he repeated, taking her hands, poor bony hands that had once been girl's hands, pretty and tiny, a joy to look at. 'Trust me. You shall do no harm either to

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yourself or to any one, and Althea shall never know.'

'I call her Althea—by her Christian name—because I knew her father before she was born—Clement Indagine—when we were all girls together—oh! a very long time ago—thirty years ago—when Claudia and Julia and——'

'Good God,' cried Laurence, 'I believe you must be—quick—who are you?' For now the dreadful thought had ripened to a more dreadful suspicion, and this already to a certain conviction. Who could she be? Why—who else could she be, than—than—'Quick,' he cried again. 'Tell me who you are?'

'Why do you look so strange?' she asked. 'What does it matter to you who I am?'

'Oh!' he groaned, 'if you knew!'

'Will you promise—you look as if you would be true to your word—will you promise faithfully not to tell Cornelia that you know?'

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'Yes, yes, yes, I promise. She shall not know.'

'Because, after all, she has done what she could for me. Her tongue is cruel sometimes, but not always—and only last Saturday she was kinder than usual. She gave me a paper bag full of victuals and she began to talk all of her own accord about the old times. "Florry," she said—it was such a long time since she called me Florry that I began to cry—"Florry"——'

'You are Florry!' cried Laurence. 'You are my mother's only sister—Oh! my GOD! you are her sister Florry!'

In a single moment he understood the meaning of it: the reason of Cornelia's desire to keep this poor creature and all knowledge of her from the family: the whole miserable history. This was the lost sister whom he was to discover if possible. And now he had found her and she was this starving woman in rags and destitution, paying penalty so dire for her sins and follies.

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But the woman shrieked and shrank back from him. If this had been said and done in the street she would have fled. But in the room she could not fly. She covered her face with her hands and sank upon the ground, where she crouched moaning and crying and sobbing.

Laurence bent over her and tried to raise her. Nothing but the misery was in his mind.

'I am your sister's son,' he said. 'I am your nephew. Oh! It is all over: the misery is finished. Don't cry, don't cry. Thank God! I have found you at last. It is all over—all the starving and the misery. Don't cry, oh! don't cry. I shall take you away and dress you and get you into a better lodging, and I shall carry you out to Australia to my mother, your sister Lucy, whom you loved so much. Don't cry any more. Althea shall come. We will bring you back to happiness again. Lift up your poor head and be comforted. Now we have found you we will keep you and never let you go

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again. You are Florry—you are my mother's only sister——'

So he went on, saying he knew not what, talking of consolation and comfort—whispering messages of love while the poor woman still wept and cried that now she was punished indeed since she could no longer hide her shameful head from her innocent sister.

Presently he led her, trembling and shaking, down the stairs and out into the street. And how he strengthened her with food and bought clothes for her and refused to leave her until he had established her in a decent lodging where she would be looked after—these things belong to the 'Book of the Things Left Out.'

What he found was a creature half mad with want and misery: what he left was a woman, thin and worn, her soft eyes sad but not despairing, her face gentle and calm, the wildness and the horror gone out of it: her starved and frozen heart opening once more in the warmth of love. But alas! for such as

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Florry, who have never quite lost the better self; with love returning comes avenging shame.

She slept after long years of hardness in physical ease. She had eaten: she had been clothed: warmth and rest wrapped her about. When she laid her head upon the pillow she felt still her nephew's arms about her neck: his kiss upon her cheek: and she heard his voice—Lucy's voice—murmuring in her ear. All was over: all was forgotten: she was no longer Mrs. Sinclair, the woman of two pair back, in arrears with her rent: she was Florry, Florry again—and across the water Lucy was stretching forth hands of welcome and crying tears of joy. But in the morning was to come that other Messenger—he with the *Flagellum*.

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CHAPTER XXVI

IN RICHMOND PARK

THEY sat in silence on the grass beside the lake of Richmond Park. The afternoon was warm and soft in the season of early autumn, the only one of the four which hardly ever disappoints us. The light of the sloping sun lay upon their faces, the ferns were brown and the trees were golden: it was so quiet that one could hear the whirr of the swallow and the browsing of the deer close beside and the snapping of the twigs when a rabbit broke cover and ran across. They were hundreds of miles from the haunt of man: there was no rambler in the Park that afternoon except themselves. There are many sweet and quiet

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spots round London whither the people come not, except a few on Sundays. There is a certain corner of Hampstead Heath which they know not even on the Sunday. There is a bit of Epping Forest which is always deserted; there is a glade or two still left of Hainault Forest where you may wander undisturbed even by the gipsies: but the quietest and loneliest spot of any is that beside the lake in Richmond Park where the herons fly overhead and the wild-duck make long lines and acute angles against the sky, and the deer roam undisturbed and the wood-birds sing. Hither Laurence brought the two girls and here they sat in silence, partly because all three were full of thought, and partly because the place was too beautiful for idle talk.

'If it would only last,' said Althea with a sigh, 'if we could only go on sitting here without getting tired, and if the sun would not set—Oh! it seems as if one could never forget this place and this afternoon. Yet,

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perhaps to-morrow we may have forgotten half. Let us try to remember it, Cassie. We will say to ourselves—there was the Lake: there was the Bridge: there was the Boat-house—we must not leave out the reeds: behind us were the trees with the twigs lying about the roots and the brown fern stretched out beyond the trees: there was the heron flying overhead with his long legs behind him: there was the sunlight on the water and the blue sky and—oh! if one were a painter to put it all down upon canvas and preserve the memory of it for ever!'

'And in an hour or less,' said Cassie, 'we shall be back again on Bank Side. Mr. Waller, you are grave to-day. When you took us to the West End you laughed and talked. Has anything gone wrong?'

'No; I have only something more to think of,' he replied. 'It is, in fact, something that ought to make one happier.'

'Mr. Waller,' said Cassie, after another little silence, 'tell us at last—tell us, why did

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you come to Bank Side first of all—you who had all the rest of the world to choose?'

'Bank Side is a very picturesque place: and as Althea knows, it is full of Elizabethan ghosts.'

'But it was not to see ghosts that you came.'

Laurence, who had been lying at the girls' feet, rose and walked to the water's edge, and looked across the lake. Then he came back to them so grave of face that Cassie was afraid of him. Yet every woman likes to see serious purpose in the face of a man.

'I came to Bank Side, Cassie,' he said, standing before them, 'not to see the Elizabethan ghosts, but to make your acquaintance.'

'Mine?'

'Yours, and that of your father and the rest of you. I had also to find out, if possible, the truth about certain little things for one who formerly lived near you. Well, I made your acquaintance, and I found that as for

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these things I could do no good. So I thought I would go away again. And then I—I made other friends, and I saw that there was a Story going on: so I thought I would stay and see the end of it: but somehow I became a character in the story, which served me right for looking on: and then I fancied that the story was ended, and so I went away. But about that I was wrong, and so I came back again. And now the story seems nearly finished.'

Both girls were silent, because they also were characters in that story.

'It will be finished very soon now,' he said.

'What will the end be like?' said Cassie.

'I cannot say. I only know what I hope. I came here a stranger among all you people, of whom I had never heard. That was only three months ago. What have you become to me? For even if I were now to go away and leave you, I could never forget you.'

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'Oh! but what have you done for us?' said Cassie.

'I came among you with a light heart,' Laurence went on, 'thinking to amuse myself. It is not precisely amusement that I have found here: it is a new interest in life, and a change in all my thoughts.'

He spoke to Cassie, and he avoided looking at Althea, who gazed straight before her and seemed not to hear. But her lips quivered and her eyes softened.

'I have a thing to tell you all,' Laurence added after a little; 'but you and I, Cassie, have been such special friends that I should like to tell you now. May I?'

'Oh, yes, if you please.'

'It is a confession. I came among you with concealment of the truth. When I found, to my surprise, that none of you knew what my name, I thought, would have suggested, I did not tell who I really was, and I have never yet told any of you.'

'But we know,' said Cassie. 'You are the

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son of Sir David Waller, who is Prime Minister of New South Wales.'

'That is certainly true. But my mother, Cassie, is your father's first cousin.'

'Oh!' Cassie jumped to her feet and clapped her hands. 'Aunt Cornelia said the other night that you had her cousin Lucy's voice and her face—and nobody took any notice of her. Oh! then you are my cousin, too.'

'I am your cousin, too, Cassie.' He held out both his hands.

'Oh! you are my cousin—oh! my own cousin!'

'Yes. And so, you see, you must call me by my Christian name in future. But you need not tell Flavia or anybody just yet. It is our own secret to ourselves.'

'Oh! Laurence!—I am to call you Laurence?—I am afraid it seems like taking a liberty. What will they say? And is your mother, my cousin, too, really and truly a ladyship? Do they call her my lady?'

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'Certainly, sometimes.'

'And are you really rich, and do you live in a big house?'

'Yes, and there is room in it for you. I have written to my mother to have it kept for you. Because, Cassie, you see, the story about the girl who went away and forgot her troubles is going to be a true story after all. You are going out to Australia with me, away from the old place, and you are going to forget—all kinds of things.'

Cassie hung her head and said nothing.

Then they were all silent again—and what each thought of I know not. The girls sat side by side—and Laurence walked slowly along the grassy borders of the lake while the sun sank in the west, and the warm autumn day came to an end.

Presently he returned to them.

'There goes the sun,' he said. 'Let us walk back to Richmond and have dinner. Even on the most beautiful day of the year—this has been the most beautiful sunset of all

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this year, except one—we must have dinner. For my own part the happier I am the happier does dinner make me. Men are made so. Althea'—he called her by her Christian name and it seemed the right and natural thing—'have we taken you too far? Are you tired?'

Then they walked back in silence through the deepening twilight. Presently Cassie stole her hand upon Laurence's arm.

'I am so glad,' she murmured, 'I am so very glad you are my cousin. I will go with you anywhere—anywhere—to get away from here. Are you sure your mother will like to have me?'

The tables at the Star and Garter are not crowded on a weekday in September. Laurence took one of those which look out upon the winding river and the broad valley. At first they had the great dining-room to themselves, except for a young couple returning home after their honeymoon. It was the last evening before they were to settle down in

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the dingy suburb of the manufacturing town: the last evening of romance: next day, and every day afterwards, the counting-house and the factory. When the College of Physicians has lengthened our span to a hundred and eighty, or perhaps two hundred and fifty, the honeymoon will take ten years at least.

The dinner was not so gay as that one in Regent Street: but they talked with cheerfulness, and perhaps it was happier. Cassie called Laurence cousin, a hundred times; she laughed to think what Aunt Cornelia would say; she permitted herself little archnesses of speech which are allowed among young persons connected by a tie which is too slender ever to become, like some family ties, a chain.

The waiter exactly understood the situation, although Cassie was the principal talker. He recognised the Queen of the Feast: he hovered around Althea, showering upon her those attentions which only a sympathetic waiter can bestow: this was an English waiter, of course. He of Germany or Swit-

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zerland cannot understand these *nuances*; he knows not the poetry of his profession. We must not set him down as mercenary because his thoughtful attentions received an ample guerdon when the little addition was discharged. Chords of the heart may be touched without a thought of tips. This waiter had been young. Shall not beauty, youth and love between them be able to strike the trembling lyre and awaken as upon an Eolian harp a tender symphony?

The evening, however, was not to finish without another adventure.

At the close of their feast when the waiter had brought them the coffee, a party of half-a-dozen entered the room and noisily took possession of a table reserved for them. Three were ladies and three men. The ladies, who wore magnificent attire and were all three very splendid in appearance and of commanding beauty and possessed of complexions most wonderful and eyes most curiously bright, laughed and talked more loudly

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than is customary with ladies in a public place. One of the men corresponded in appearance and manners to the ladies: he looked as if he could have played to the life the part of a buccaneer or a gentleman, highwayman, or a gallant Cavalry rider under Prince Rupert. He would be set down by those who knew the world as a bookmaker, adventurer, modern privateer, or, to sum up, a bounder: his laugh was loud; his shoulders were square, and he carried a swagger as pronounced as that of any old Peninsular Officer in the Twenties. He was a good-looking creature, black of hair and of eye, who proclaimed in his face the fact that morality or principle of the old-fashioned kind was not his strongest point. The second was a young gentleman of more pleasing appearance and quieter manners. He took his part in the loud laughter of his friends. And the third, who placed himself at the head of the table and was apparently the host, was none other than the future President of the Royal

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Society—Oliver Luttrell. One of the ladies was the divine Julia and one of the gentlemen was the gallant Mr. Harry Stanley. Althea turned her head and saw him.

'There is Oliver,' she cried. 'Does Oliver give dinner parties at Richmond? And what a strange set of people with him!'

Cassie looked round and saw him too. He was bending over one of the ladies—she knew their kind: she had assisted at the taking of their photographs: Oliver at the Star and Garter giving a feast to actresses of the kind who laugh loudly and paint thickly—Oliver who had no money—Oliver who thought about nothing but science: Oliver who had been making love to Althea: and with such a party! But Althea paid no more attention: it was quite indifferent to her if Oliver entertained strange goddesses with feasting and champagne. The giver of that banquet, fortunately, did not see them: and they presently went away, the laughter of the party ringing in their ears.

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'Is your idol shattered yet?' Laurence whispered in the train. 'He swore once that he loved you. Then he changed his mind. He swore that he loved Althea—as if any man could love Althea and give dinners to such people as those! Cassie, where is your lover as you imagined him?'

'If the idol is shattered,' said Cassie sadly, 'give me a little time, Laurence, to clear away the fragments.'

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE TWO WILLS

'A GENTLEMAN, Sir, wants to see you.'

'To see me? Nonsense. It is the Doctor he wants to see.'

'No, Sir, it's you. He asked for Mr. Indagine.'

The Poet took the card.

'It isn't a man,' he said. 'It is a Firm—a Firm of solicitors—Messrs. Racket, Saye and Seal, Lincoln's Inn Fields. What can lawyers want with me? Perhaps—' his thoughts, as usual, running upon his great literary fame—'Perhaps they come from some Firm of Publishers.'

'I will go into the other room.'

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'No—no—why should you do that? There is only Althea in the other room. Stay here. I have no secrets. Why, if you come to think of it, he *must* be sent by some publishers. No one else can have any business with me. He has been sent to ask what price I put upon the new volume. Advise me, my friend. Stand by me and assist with your advice. In all such things I am indeed a wretched bungler.'

'Shall we see, first, what he wants?' said Laurence, incredulous as to the firm of publishers.

It was not the Firm in person, but their representative, who waited without. He was a young gentleman recently qualified, who esteemed himself fortunate in being able to find in these bad times a berth as clerk at a modest salary in so good a House. The Casual wards are reported to be every night crowded with young solicitors, young Barristers, young physicians, young surgeons, young engineers, young architects, young novelists,

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young dramatists, and young poets on the tramp looking for jobs and finding none. He who escapes the Casual ward is accounted happy. This young man bore his good fortune without boastfulness. But, being young and therefore easily put out by the unexpected, he was somewhat impressed, on being introduced into the room, by the strangeness of the place. One hardly looks to find upon the Bank a student's library with all the properties complete and an unmistakable student, a man of ink, in a brown velvet jacket and long white beard.

'Mr. Clement Indagine?' He addressed himself to the Poet. 'I bring you a letter and a packet.'

'A letter? From what House do you come, Sir?'

'From Messrs. Racket, Saye and Seal. The letter is from your late brother, Mr. Æneas Indagine.'

'It's the Professor!' cried Laurence. 'I had clean forgotten the Professor. I should

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have told you, Sir, long ago, that on the steamer I made the acquaintance of a nephew of yours—one Sylvester Indagine.'

'My father's name was Sylvester. But—my late brother?' he held the letter unopened in his hand—'my late brother? and my nephew?'

'One of the Professor's purposes in coming to England,' Laurence went on, 'was, he told me, to repair if possible some wrong. But I quite forgot him. Where is Professor Indagine?'

'He employed us to search for Mr. Clement Indagine. For a long time we were unable to hear anything about him, and then the Professor was obliged to return to America. We learned his place of residence yesterday by a kind of accident through a certain Barrister's clerk, Cottle by name.'

'I am bewildered,' said the Poet. 'You bring me a letter from my brother who has been lost to me for five and thirty years—you tell me he is dead: you speak of a

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nephew in search of me—actually in search of me and unable to find me—Me. And you go on to say that your Firm—a Firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn—has also been in search of me, and that you have been able to hear nothing of me—nothing—nothing—of *Me*! That is wonderful!'

'The Saturday Reviewer, remember,' Laurence made haste to remind him, 'was in just the same position. "Where," he asked, "is Clement Indagine"?'

'True—true.' The ruffled Poet was easily smoothed. 'These lawyers, you would say, knew my name and fame, naturally—everybody knew that, but they could not learn my residence. I say, Sir,' he turned to the Representative, 'that you asked yourselves not—who was Clement Indagine, but where was Clement Indagine.'

The young gentleman who brought the letter began to understand that there are many things of which even a passed solicitor may be ignorant; he had suspected this before, in

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moments of depression: as, for instance, the name and fame of Mr. Clement Indagine. But he smiled and looked foolish, and because he felt that he looked foolish, he blushed and looked more foolish still.

'Had you not better proceed to read the letter?' said Laurence.

'Yes—yes. Is this the letter?' Mr. Indagine looked at it doubtfully. 'It is a voice from the tomb. My brother, who is dead, is about to speak to me.' He looked as if he was not anxious to hear this voice from the tomb. Well. Few people are. 'My brother,' he went on, turning the letter about, but not opening it, 'left us five and thirty years ago. This letter, my friend, is going to revive the memory of a wretched time, a miserable time, a time which I had thought was long since buried, never even to be spoken of or thought of. We had a miserable childhood, and a miserable upgrowing. We were Children of a Prison—and our gaoler was our own uncle—whose name I cannot bear to pronounce.' He

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trembled with agitation. 'I say, wretched memory—I cannot bear to open the letter. No —I cannot. Read it for me, my friend. No —better not. Call Althea, if you please. She shall read the letter to me.' The name of his brother and the letter which he held in his hand, recalled the Queen's Bench to his mind and the days when he spent the mornings at his desk in the Row among the books and his evenings with his father and brother in the Prison. 'Althea, child, read this letter for me. Read it aloud and let us get it over. It is from your uncle, who is dead. I do not know whether he did well or whether he failed. He went away years ago, and we have never once heard from him. Read it, my dear.' He leaned his head upon his hand, expecting to be taken forcibly back to those days which he would so willingly have forgotten. Althea opened the letter and read it.

'My dear Brother,—I am told that I am dying. During the long years since we parted

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I have always looked forward to getting home and seeing you again. This will never happen —and I shall go to my long home without that happiness. I ought to have written many a year ago, but I have led so busy a life that I put it off from time to time until it seemed too late. I have been very busy and very prosperous, because I had the good luck to come straight out West.

'Before I die there is a small thing on my mind. I say a small thing, but I do not know. It may have proved a very great thing. If mischief has come of it I am sorry. It is this. When I made up my mind that the only thing I could do was to run clean away and so get out of the difficulties which I still believe were caused by our dear uncle for his own purposes, I thought I would play him a certain trick which would be likely to cause him annoyance and trouble. Therefore, before I left Backler's office I opened the tin box containing Mr. Norbery's papers; I took them all out, tied them up, and brought them along with me.

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'Well; I tossed them into my trunk and they came to America with me—and then, after awhile, when I settled down here and began to get work I forgot all about them. Mind, I fully meant to send them back. But I quite forgot. I fear that their loss may have caused more than annoyance. However it is now too late to do anything more than send them back. I suppose my uncle can hardly be living still: but you can give the papers to his executors. As for me I have not opened the parcel and I have no knowledge of its contents. My son will take it to England and will place it just as I brought it away, in your hands. He will also tell you everything about me, but when you get the letter I shall be lying in the cemetery.

'I hope, my dear Clement, that you are well, prosperous and happy. My son will be wealthy, and you must use him freely if you are in any want or trouble. Farewell.

'ÆNEAS.'

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Mr. Indagine lifted his head with a sigh, as one who has listened to a prayer.

'I thought it would have been worse,' he said. 'Poor Æneas! So he is dead. I should like to see his son. Perhaps he will come again. Not a word about the old memories. Like me, Æneas would not willingly recall them. Write to your American cousin, Althea, and tell him all that has happened. Perhaps he does not even know that the English Poet who bears his surname is actually his father's brother. When the new volume comes out he shall have a copy.'

'Here are the papers spoken of in the letter,' said the young solicitor, opening his bag and taking them out.

'The papers? Oh! yes—well—I have nothing to do with my uncle's property. I refuse to receive any papers.' Mr. Indagine, so to speak, brushed them aside.

'We understand on inquiry, that the Treasury has taken possession of the Norbery estates. Do you wish us to communicate these documents to the Treasury?'

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'My dear Sir, you will do exactly as you please. I have no interest whatever in the business. My brother's foolish action cannot have made any difference. Of what consequence is the loss of a few papers? And if any action has to be taken I shall not take it.'

The lawyer looked with pity upon a man who thought that the loss of a few papers could be of no consequence.

'Well, sir, we opened the packet at the request of the Professor, and we found in it a will, which, considering that Mr. Norbery was supposed to die intestate, may prove of very great importance indeed.'

'Well, sir, do what you please with it. It is no concern of mine.'

'We understand that the property in question is very large.'

'Oh!' cried Mr. Indagine with impatience. 'Shall I never hear the end of that accursed Property? Take away your will—Tear it up —Take it away, I say. Do what you like with it,' he repeated irritably.

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'My dear Sir—Tear it up? Tear up a legal document?'

'My father,' Althea explained, gently, 'means that he can never consent to take by will or otherwise any portion of that estate.'

'No portion. None,' said Mr. Indagine, with vehemence. 'Take it away. The sight of the thing with the knowledge of what it represents irritates me. Take it out of my sight.'

Then Laurence remembered a certain passage in his mother's letter of instructions.

'Can you tell us briefly,' he said, 'the disposition of the estate by the will?'

'Certainly. The will leaves the whole of the estate absolutely to one Lucy Holford, then the Testator's housekeeper.'

'Oh!' It was Althea who started, remembering what Laurence had told her.

'And it names one Vicesimus Cottle of Bank Side as sole executor.'

Then this was the will spoken of by his mother.

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'To Lucy Holford,' Mr. Indagine said with a sigh of relief. 'And nothing at all to me. Ah! That is exactly as it should be. My uncle had so much grace at the end. He spared me the last insult of bequeathing me my father's property which he had stolen: that was well done of him. Some men would have pretended to atone by leaving money to their victims. He did not. Althea, my dear, henceforth no one can say that we are in the least interested in this abominable estate. No man can ask me why I would make no movement in the matter. Young gentleman, you may now tie up all those papers again and take them away. I refuse to receive them. With Mr. Norbery living or dead, I will have no dealings whatever.'

'Well, but,' said the young lawyer, 'this is a matter of very great importance: you would not keep anybody out of his rights. Will you at least tell me what you can of the persons named?'

'So far, I will help you. The Executor,

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Mr. Vicesimus Cottle, has been dead for twenty years. Lucy Holford, I heard, went away, but I cannot tell you anything more. She was a niece of that clerk Lucius Cottle who gave you my place of residence. There were two sisters, Lucy and Florry. They were pretty girls: my brother Æneas and Florry, I remember, were once supposed—but that is boy and girl story. The girls were quite poor and they were very pretty—and—well, sir, I am sorry to say that I cannot tell you more. Their cousin, Mr. Lucius Cottle, may give you further information about this heiress. I refer you to him; and now I wish you good morning, young gentleman.'

Althea looked at Laurence—Would he speak? But he preserved a countenance unmoved. The Sphynx herself looks not upon the short-lived generations with an expression of less interest.

'Then,' said the solicitor, 'I suppose I had better take away the papers.'

Whilst he was folding them up, steps and

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voices were heard without. The door opened and Oliver appeared. Behind him stood Mr. Mayes. He was then in the midst of his electric treatment and his diet. Enforced exercise and total abstinence had made him both pale and thin. Also, his natural anxiety about the obstruction of the Motor path, which seemed resolved to yield to no severities, the awful expense of the treatment, and the physical sufferings which he endured, naturally made him irritable.

'You here, Oliver?' cried Mr. Indagine. 'Wait a minute, my dear boy—we have just completed the business. But why are you here, Sir?' he addressed Mr. Mayes. 'I thought you understood——'

'I have brought him,' said Oliver. 'I will explain why, directly. It is a business connected with the Norbery Estate.'

'Good Heavens! We have just finished that business. Take him away, Oliver—take him and his business too, out of my sight.'

'But it concerns Althea,' said Oliver.

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'No—no—no—nobody here is concerned at all. My uncle left his property to his housekeeper, Lucy Holford. The will has been found.'

'To his housekeeper—to Lucy Holford?' Oliver turned pale.

'Here is the will,' said the solicitor. 'Perhaps you will be able to give us some information respecting that lady.'

Oliver snatched the will and looked at the date. Then he laughed gently and laid it down upon the table.

'It bears your signature, Mayes,' he said. 'And it is thirty years old.'

'Lord!' Mr. Mayes ejaculated. 'So it is—my signature! Yes—Yes, Yes—I remember witnessing that Will very well. Where in the world was it found?'

'You remember witnessing that will?' Laurence asked.

'I remember it as well as—as well as——'

'Witnessing the other,' suggested Oliver, sharply.

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'Yes—yes—oh, yes.' It was perhaps the Treatment which made him turn so white and tremble at the knees. Perhaps it was the contrast between the clear recollection of the one, and the blank space in his mind where the second event should have been photographed indelibly. 'I remember the day very well and everything he said. It was a hot day in summer.'

'Well,' said Oliver, 'that only wastes time. You have brought with you a document which sets this will aside.'

Mr. Mayes drew a paper out of his pocket and laid it upon the table without speaking.

'What is this?' asked the solicitor.

'Another and a later will.'

'This is very wonderful. Two wills, and both to turn up on the same day?'

'I know nothing about any earlier paper,' said Oliver. 'What Mr. Mayes has is a document found a day or two ago by his clerk among some old papers. I have asked Mr. Mayes to bring it here, and I have come with

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him, first because I am—indirectly—concerned with the will, and next because Mr. Mayes fancied there might be some prejudice.'

'Misunderstanding,' said Mr. Mayes. 'Parties not being always business men.'

'Oliver,' said Mr. Indagine, 'if that Will leaves me anything——'

'It doesn't.'

'Then I am not concerned with it. Take it away.'

'But this is interesting,' said Laurence. A second time he experienced that very odd sensation of having the cup snatched from his lips. 'This is very interesting indeed.'

'I don't know how it concerns you,' said Oliver, rudely.

'Nevertheless, it is interesting.'

'Well, then,' Mr. Mayes explained, 'it's all left to the young lady there, provided she changes her name by a certain time, and if she doesn't, then to Mr. Luttrell here. Seems as if the old gentleman couldn't abide the

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name of Indagine. Made money, perhaps, by some of the family, which naturally set him agen the rest.'

'That, you see, is the position,' said Oliver. 'As for myself, Althea——'

'You have heard what my father said, Oliver. We can have nothing to do with Mr. Norbery's will.'

'Well, Althea, considering everything—' Oliver glanced at Laurence—'considering all that has passed—it matters nothing in the long run. Though I would rather that my wife——'

'Your wife, Oliver?' She faced him with steady eyes which he could not meet. 'Your wife?'

'My wife, I said, should have her own property to herself. Still, as I shall have it, there will be no difference.'

'Your wife, Oliver?' she repeated with no change in her colour, but still the steady determined eyes.

'Come, Althea——'

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'Your wife, Oliver?' she repeated a third time.

'There was a promise,' he replied dropping his own eyes.

'What promise? Repeat that promise.'

Oliver was silent. But he seemed to grow smaller—and the old ugly look fell upon him.

'You understand me, perfectly, Oliver. You know perfectly what was said on that occasion. What is the meaning of this new pretence?'

'Pretence or not, what does it matter?' he replied, doggedly. 'If you will not profit by the will, I shall. That is the situation. If you choose to remain poor, I shall not. You cannot blame me, Althea.'

'I do not blame you, Oliver. You will do as you please.'

'Good Heavens!' cried the exasperated poet, 'you drive me mad with your Wills and your conditions. Go away all of you. Oliver, take away this person who came the other

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day to sell the secret of his precious Will. Wanted a commission or a percentage for handing it over. Let this person understand that he will get nothing from me. Do exactly what you like all of you. But never speak to me again about the Norbery Estate.'

Laurence, meanwhile, had been looking at the latest of the two wills.

'It seems a very intelligible document,' he said. 'The man had, I suppose, no other relation but yourself, Mr. Indagine, and he seems to have hated you. Mr. Mayes, whose knowledge of human nature does him great credit, has supplied the motive. Mr. Norbery made money, perhaps by sharp practices, out of your family. We naturally hate those whom we have injured. So he left it all to your daughter, not to you, and to her only on condition that she should not bear the name which he hated. This kind of hatred makes one think better of humanity. It seems to show the existence of conscience. Perhaps Mr. Mayes understands the passion.'

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Mr. Mayes was heard to murmur something about fine words in connection with Australia.

'I quite agree with Mr. Waller,' said Oliver. 'The document is perfectly natural and reasonable. And as for my name being there, it was put in because it was necessary to put in some one in case of the condition being unfulfilled.'

'Quite so,' said Laurence folding up the paper. 'We may congratulate you, Mr. Luttrell. When the necessary formalities are completed—I suppose that the thing is all right—you will be able to have many more little dinners at the "Star and Garter."'

'What do you mean by that?' Oliver asked quickly.

'Really—what I said—nothing more. We saw you the other day with your friends: you seemed a cheerful company. And strictly scientific. Here is the will.' As he was handing it over, his eye was caught by something. 'Stay,' he said. 'Here is some writ-

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ing.' He looked more closely. 'It is a very small, fine writing, apparently later than the body of the will—in fresher ink—it looks like a foreign language—well, I cannot read it, and I suppose that it doesn't matter. There, Mr. Mayes; you did find something after all.'

'It is a most extraordinary thing,' the Solicitor remarked, professionally. 'The estate of the Intestate long since taken over by the Treasury; a very large estate; and two wills actually turning up on the same day! It is truly wonderful.'

'Well, gentlemen,' said Mr. Indagine, settling himself in his chair again, 'you have wasted an hour of my valuable time. I wish you all good morning. Go and talk about it outside.'

He plunged into his papers and became immediately absorbed.

Oliver lingered behind. Laurence retired discreetly to the window.

'Althea,' said Oliver with sweetness. 'I

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knew your feeling about myself, all along. I wished above all things to do what would please—' he pointed to her father bent over his desk. 'Therefore I willingly deceived myself. As for what I said just now, I was prompted by the desire to bring matters to a head—to set you free if you wished it, even from that conditional understanding. Well—you are free, and I am free. As for your refusal, I say it is Quixotic, Althea. Nothing less.'

'It is my father's wish, Oliver. That is enough.'

'Well. But you must not think the worse of me if I profit by this wonderful windfall?'

'Surely, not. You will act exactly as you think is best and right.'

'Thank you, Althea. The difference between nothing a year and a large income is for a scientific man incalculable. I shall now command my own Laboratory—I shall multiply my work by ten. I shall conduct

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Research by means of others—Oh! you cannot understand, Althea.'

For the moment he looked again the old Oliver, eager and athirst for science. Althea forgot, while he spoke, his cruel desertion of Cassie.

'Tell my father,' he went on. 'Let him understand that through your sacrifice—yours, Althea—I am going to become rich—independent, my own master—and—and—. Good-bye, Althea.'

He touched her fingers—the last time that he was ever to touch her fingers—and was gone.

Then the voice of Claudia seemed to fall upon Althea's ear. Again she heard the sentence, stern and certain.

'The young man shall be surely punished.'

'Don't let us waste our time any longer, Althea,' said the Poet. 'That business is dispatched, thank Heaven. Mr. Waller and I have a great deal to do. We are now, Mr. Waller, arrived at the poems which open the

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Third Period. Sit down, my friend. I think a note on the characteristics of this period—— Oh! shall I never hear the end of that abominable Estate? Can I never escape from the memory of the Prison?'

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CHAPTER XXVIII

'OUR COUSIN'

A PROPER SPIRIT, the resentment of 'behaviour,' a Becoming Pride, the knowledge of what is due to oneself and to the Family, jealousy of rights, and the assertion of proper station, rank or respectability—these things, though not necessarily virtues in themselves, are attributes of a certain Virtue which has been hitherto unnamed by moralists. This Virtue is conspicuously illustrated in the great and powerful Lower Middle Class; where it is the cause, unhappily—though so great a Virtue—of many family feuds, entered upon with becoming pride and persevered in with the obstinacy due to self-respect. It is less

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often found among the working men ; it is unknown in the Upper Ten Thousand, who perhaps have other virtues of their own, to make up. It was this Virtue, with its attendant nymphs of Pride, Resentment, and Suspicion, which separated Claudia and Cornelia for eighteen long years. How the little rift began which widened to so great a fissure, I know not. There was once a tradition among the girls concerning a forgotten postage stamp, but this may surely be disregarded. Suffice it to say that for eighteen years Cornelia owed a Call. This simple fact should be enough. She owed a Call, and she did not pay it. Therefore, for eighteen years the Sisters never met.

Imagine, therefore, the astonishment of the Family Circle, when Claudia unexpectedly ignored the Call so long due and visited her brother and sister and her nieces at the Family Home, the Cradle of the Race.

She came without sending word to prepare their minds. She suddenly opened the

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door and stood before them, smiling pleasantly, dressed in her silk and lace, her gold chain about her neck, a dignified and gracious lady.

'Cornelia,' she said, 'I hope you are very well—Lucius, how do you do?' That was all: not a word of explanation or regret: only she smiled and walked in.

'Aunt Claudia!' cried Flavia—'Oh!'

'Sister Claudia!' cried Cornelia, springing to her feet.

'Claudia!' cried Lucius. 'Is it possible?'

'Quite possible,' she replied exchanging with her sister the kiss of reconciliation, which was not a long and lingering kiss, but a birdlike peck. 'Quite possible, Lucius. Perhaps our long separation has been partly my fault.'

Cornelia sat down. She recovered quickly from her surprise and was herself again. She folded her hands in her lap sitting bolt upright.

'Perhaps your fault,' she echoed. 'As for

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me I have long forgiven you, sister. That was my duty. Though if anyone——'

'Claudia'—Lucius hastened to stop the danger of explanation—'we rejoice to see you once more. You are looking well and younger than we might have expected—I'm sure—when we consider the wear and tear of your life. Prophecy is said to age people rapidly. This is my boy Sempronius—this is Cassie, and Flavia you know.'

'It is comfortable,' said Claudia, sitting down and smoothing her skirts, 'to be with one's own people again. We go out into the world and do what we are called and chosen to do. But there is nothing like the old house after all. You've changed nothing,' she looked round the room. 'It is all as I remember it. As for what you are doing, Flavia gives me all the news, so that I know everything and you need not explain.'

'A long time ago,' Cornelia began again, 'I resolved that it was my duty to forgive,

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and I have endeavoured to forget, though from one's own sister——'

'Nay, Cornelia—' said Lucius, 'on this occasion we will have none but pleasant memories. Your little Chapel, Claudia?' he asked with the condescension of an Anglican, 'it still keeps up, I hope; and the attendance —and the collections—show no falling off?'

'The Truth cannot fall off, brother, though members may come and go. And you, Cornelia, remain still in your old place—in the Church?'

'I am still at the post of duty. As I was saying, sister——'

'We are all,' Lucius interposed for the third time, 'at the post of duty. Though unhappily one may be at his post and yet out of his place—out of his place. Post and Place do not, as in Cornelia's case, always go together. At the present moment, we are mostly out of place.'

'So I learn. The Family,' Claudia glanced, perhaps accidentally, at her sister's stuff dress

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and again smoothed her soft silk draperies, 'has not got on very well, except myself. Not that I take credit for my own gifts. Heaven forbid! If you stay at home and look for plums to drop into your mouth you can't expect to get on. Father did much the same with his Academy. Well—my son Felix is going to Australia. He goes out with Laurence Waller.'

'With Mr. Waller?'

'You call him Mr. Waller. Yes. For the present. Well!' again she looked round the old familiar room. 'Everything just the same. Oh! Cornelia, if you lived a thousand years you would keep everything just the same. There is grandfather's portrait and the samplers and the punch bowl and the silver candlesticks. If you had become a flourishing man, Lucius, I suppose that all would have been changed and the very house given up.'

'Give up the old house, Claudia? Never!'

'Well: it is pleasant to look round and

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remember the old times—and two girls and a boy again, who might be Cornelia and you, Lucius, and I. But there are changes coming.'

'What changes?'

Claudia paused. The pause made her reply more impressive. 'There are going to be many changes,' she said—'many and important changes. That is partly why I am here to-night.'

'I am ignorant of any changes,' said Lucius; 'what changes should there be?'

'You will soon be in ignorance no longer. When changes are hanging over a Family it is right that all should be united. Therefore, I am here. No more explanations, Cornelia, if you please. We are united once more. That is enough.'

She spoke with authority though Cornelia was her elder, and she assumed her prophetic manner and her voice became deeper and the smile left her face, and her eyes lost their sympathy.

Then awe fell upon those who heard

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her, even upon Cornelia herself, who had thought never to be awed by a younger sister and the Prophet of a Dissenting Chapel.

'There will be changes,' she repeated. 'Those who have been lost to us will be restored. Those whom we thought dead will be alive; we shall gain but we shall lose: there will be separations: the past will be destroyed, yet we shall be preserved. Everything that we now look upon will be dispersed. Yet a week or two and we shall be regarding the world with changed eyes. Therefore I am here, to warn you and to share with you: to take counsel with you and to give it.'

'It's terrible,' whispered Flavia. 'She knows everything. Father, ask her for more. She can tell all that is going to happen.' But Lucius, who was now pale and trembling, wriggled in his chair. To be in search of a place puts a man at a disadvantage in presence of a Prophetess. She might, for instance, announce that he would never find one.

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'Why,' said Cornelia, 'as for that, anybody can say that things are going to happen. While I sit in the empty Church I see what is going to happen as plain as if it was written upon the wall in letters of gold like the Commandments. I know what will happen very well if Lucius and Cassie don't find work to do after Mr. Waller, who's our chief support, goes away. When we lose his five-and-thirty shillings a week where shall we be? Can you tell more, Claudia? But in my Church they don't call me a Prophetess.'

'I tell you again, that there will be great changes. A change for you, Lucius: a change for Flavia: a change for Cassie: a change for Sempronius—a change for Althea and for her father: a change for all. For you and me, Cornelia, loss and separation.'

'Isn't she wonderful?' cried Flavia.

'Enough of warning.' Claudia looked round smiling again. 'I have come for other things. I bring you a message. It is from Laurence Waller, who is coming himself in a

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few minutes. I promised to save him the trouble of explaining.'

'Is he actually going, then?' cried Flavia. 'Oh! what shall we do?'

'He is not going just yet. But he wishes me to tell you——'

'He ought to give a fortnight's notice,' said Cornelia.

'He wishes me to tell you——'

'Nay,' said Lucius. 'He has been a great happiness to us. He shall come and go as he pleases. As for the money, I shall find another berth, no doubt, unless Claudia prophesies against it.'

'He wishes me to tell you,' resumed Claudia, 'what he might have told you at the outset, only, I suppose, it seemed romantic to be here in disguise. He did not let you know who he really is—in fact, he is no other——'

'He is the son of Cousin Lucy,' cried Cornelia sitting up triumphantly. 'I always knew it. Lucius, you will bear witness that I always said it!'

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'You did, Cornelia, you certainly did.'

'Lucy's voice, Lucy's eyes. I always said it. And now I do hope we shall hear no more nonsense about his father being a nobleman. And perhaps we shall find out where he gets the money that he flings about as if he had the whole Bank at his back, taking girls to theatres and giving them champagne and gold watches, and turning their foolish heads. And perhaps he will tell us now what he does for his living and where his mother works.'

Claudia laughed pleasantly.

'My dear Cornelia, you are too quick. His father has been knighted and is now Sir David Waller. Therefore, though it is wonderful to think of, Cousin Lucy is Lady Waller, and they are very rich indeed. They have got cattle stations, sheep runs, houses, and all kinds of things—Lucy has her carriages and her gardens, and is now a very great lady.'

'Oh! Very well.' Cornelia sniffed gently. 'And she once a daily dressmaker! But to me she will always be plain Lucy.'

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'Laurence came here at his mother's request in order to find out the present circumstances of the Family. I always did say that Lucy had the best heart in the world, though after the way we behaved to her—there, Cornelia, we won't go into that. Well, she married a boat-builder at Rotherhithe when she left our brother-in-law——'

'A boat-builder!' Cornelia breathed again. 'Dear me! only a boat-builder! Was that all? And after coming to the Academy every Sunday afternoon for tea! But to be sure the poor girl had no choice.'

'Then his affairs went wrong and they emigrated, and everything has prospered with them since.'

'Why, children,' Lucius leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs, 'this should make us all proud and joyful: Mr. Waller, whom we will now call Laurence—which I think he will not take ill—is our cousin. He has heaped kindnesses upon us——'

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'He gave me a sovereign,' said Sempronius.

'Oh!' Flavia sighed, 'I always knew there must be some reason for it.'

'And he is our cousin. Cornelia, it matters nothing that Lucy was once a daily dressmaker. Cease to dwell upon that memory. Besides, the Family should agree to forget these little details, which are not dishonourable, certainly, yet not a cause of pride. She is now rich and a great credit to all of us. Her Ladyship confers lustre upon us. Let us welcome Laurence by saying kind things about his mother.'

'For my own part, I shall write to Lucy,' said Claudia, 'by this week's mail. But Laurence had another task imposed upon him. He was to find out, if he could, what has become of Florry——'

'Ah!' said Lucius, 'there was Florry. I wonder if she also has been raised to the rank of nobility. I wonder, now, if Florry is another subject of pride for the family?'

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'Not before the children, sister,' Cornelia whispered. There was a sudden hardening of her face, and her lips tightened, symptoms which Claudia marked.

'Why not before the girls? Do you think, Cornelia, that Laurence will perhaps find her?'

'I cannot say.'

'Do you think you could help him to find her?'

'How should I know anything about her?'

'She was so very sweet and pretty,' Claudia went on, softly murmuring, as if out of the fulness of her heart. 'I always loved Florry, but Julia's favourite was Lucy. I wonder where she went and how she fares. Sometimes I think she may have fallen into poverty.'

'That is very possible,' said Lucius. He was not clever, but he understood that in this talk about Florry, there was more than met his ear. Also he saw that Cornelia was

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disquieted, and that Claudia watched her. 'It is very possible,' he repeated, 'they were terribly poor.'

'When people succeed,' Claudia continued speaking almost as if she were quoting the words of her father, the wise man, 'their friends for the most part find them out if it is only to borrow money of them. If they fail, their friends cease to search for them, or, if they find them, they hide them away and keep them hidden—and then—oh! children —children!' she turned to the two girls, 'poverty is the greatest temptation that can fall in the way of man or woman. Pray, pray to be guarded against this temptation; pray with all your soul and with all your strength for the daily bread. Poverty causes sins innumerable; poverty destroys honour and self-respect. When the wretched creatures begin to sink lower they think to stay their fall by sin and crime. Poverty fills our prisons: poverty turns honesty into crime and virtue into dishonour. It is a terrible

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thing, indeed, to fall into poverty. Children' —her voice sank into a significant whisper, 'should one such poor creature, after long-suffering and the punishment which always awaits the transgressor, be found by one who loves her still and be drawn up out of the dreadful pit, there is nothing left for us—oh! there is nothing left for us but forgiveness, and love and silence among ourselves—yes—and silence.'

'She might be forgiven,' said Cornelia, 'but she should be kept out of sight.'

The two girls listened with awe and fear. Something was certainly going to happen.

'No,' said Claudia, 'she must be forgiven altogether and in silence. Such, Children, is the teaching of the Early Church.'

'I hope,' said Cornelia severely, 'that I may be allowed to know the doctrines of the Church as well as you, sister. It is our duty, we are told, to forgive the wicked man when he turneth away from his wickedness. But as for receiving him in silence——'

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At this point she stopped and her face became frozen. The sudden freezing of a face can only be produced by astonishment, which at the same time fixes the eyes and deprives the sufferer of the power of utterance.

For the door was thrown open and there entered Laurence.—With him a lady—a lady in whom Cornelia recognised none other than Florry herself, of whom they had been speaking. Afterwards she understood, and knew how to resent in a becoming manner, the artfulness of her sister in preparing the way for the reception of the prodigal.

But what Cornelia looked upon was Florry transformed. No longer the ragged, starving, miserable creature, wan and hollow-eyed, who dragged her way along the street and picked up crusts. Florry dressed like a lady, wearing pretty things that cost money, like the wife of a clergyman or of the general practitioner, or of the eminent grocer—but not so fine. Florry in gloves and a bonnet

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that must have cost—but of course her nephew paid for all: some people have no shame about taking presents—Florry who seemed to have gone back twenty years. Her cheeks, which flamed, gave her some of her former beauty: her soft eyes, limpid eyes, which looked once round the room and then dropped, were as sweet as ever. Florry—no longer in concealment but brought back after all to the old house—even to the Sanctuary of the Academy, the Holy Place of the Family. She held her nephew's hand, and stood with drooping head. But he stood upright and confident and masterful.

'My dear cousins,' he said, 'Claudia has explained things, I hope—I am your unworthy cousin. That is all, and I bring back to you another cousin—my aunt Florry who has been separated from you a great while.—We have found her at last and we never mean to let her go again. Never—never.'

He drew her gently and kissed her on the forehead before them all. It was not only

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the kiss of affection, but the sounding of a trumpet. Cornelia understood. It meant that Florry was to be received, with himself: it was meant for her private ear; it condemned her to silence about the past. She gasped, and for a while sat irresolute.

But Claudia snatched her cousin from Laurence's arms.

'Florry dear!—Oh! you remember me very well, I am sure. I am Claudia, my dear, though I am old and changed. But you are still pretty. Oh! my dear, how long since we have seen you! Now we have found you again we shall never let you go, never, mind —no—not until the Angel of the Lord calls you and brings the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the Saints. Florry—do not cry, Florry, you are with your own people at last, and, across the sea, your sister stretches her hand to welcome you back with love and kisses. My dear, this is a happy evening. Lucius, have you forgotten Florry? Cornelia, have you neither eyes nor

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ears? Children, this is our cousin, our cousin Florry Holford.'

Cornelia rose, her mind resolved. She assumed the frigid air of condescension with which in the old days she had been wont to receive her poor relations on Sunday Afternoon.

'Cousin,' she said coldly extending her fingers, 'it is long since you came here last. Much has happened. You have doubtless a great deal to tell us when we have time. Will you sit down? Give your cousin a chair, Flavia.'

'You mean it, Cornelia?' Florry asked timidly.

'Sit down. You are at home. With your own people.' Cornelia answered in jerks, as if each syllable was an effort. Perhaps we shall learn in good time your name. Your *married* name,' she added with emphasis.

'I am called—they called me—Sinclair.'

'Oh! Sinclair,' Cornelia pronounced the

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name as if between Cottle and Sinclair there was indeed a gulf. 'Is your husband living?'

'He is—he is—' she caught the stern rebuke in Cornelia's eyes and dropped her own. 'He is dead.'

'You are living near here?'

'Laurence has found me a lodging in Mansell Street, near the Tower.'

'You are a widow. You have dropped your widow's weeds—So has Claudia. I judge nobody. But mine I wear until my dying day.'

Flavia and Cassie, standing spectators, held their breath. What did this mean?

'She said that such an one should be received with love and silence,' whispered Flavia, 'she never says anything without a meaning.'

'Cousin Florry,' said Lucius, 'you are welcome. There are my daughters Flavia and Cassie. This is my son. You are indeed welcome, for the sake of old times and your sister, now Lady Waller.'

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'Cousin Laurence,' said Cornelia, 'I saw all along that you were Lucy's child. This should be a joyful evening to us.' She smiled, but it was one of those smiles which some sculptors delineate on marble faces—muscularly correct, yet with no gladness in them. 'I do not know whether the news that you are indeed our cousin, or whether the recovery of Florry should give us the greater joy. I hope, Florry, that your last letters from Lucy, her ladyship, were satisfactory. You will tell her of this happy meeting and give her our united loves. When she knows all—all—she will be—yes—she will be joyful indeed.'

The girls wondered. Their Aunt Cornelia was always candour itself, she disguised nothing and concealed nothing. By keeping the plain truth before her nieces she had done much to prevent the growth of conceit. Now, however, she was manifest to all as playing a part, and playing it both unwillingly and badly.

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But Claudia understood. The Honour of the Family demanded this sacrifice; that, before everything. And because Florry herself could not but feel the constraint and make-believe, she sat beside her cooing and murmuring, pressing her hand and whispering over and over again soft words of kindness and welcome, while Cornelia, her formal welcome completed, sat upright with her set smile upon her lips.

'We now understand, Cousin Laurence,' said Lucius, 'why you came to us, and why you have stayed here, and why you have heaped so many kindnesses on our heads. It was for your mother's sake. You will tell her, when you write, that we have not forgotten her, nor the old days when she came to enjoy my father's conversation on Sunday Afternoon. Perhaps his wisdom may have helped her upward flight. Tell her that we rejoice unfeignedly—say unfeignedly, lest she should think that there is a single grain of envy in any of us—I say a grain'—he turned

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his back on Cornelia in order to show everybody that he meant no reflection upon her, 'one single grain of envy in any of our hearts. No: we are proud of her rise to fortune and distinction. She adds another name to Bank Side. With those of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Massinger, Vicesimus Cottle and Clement Indagine, the historians will henceforth couple that of Lucy, Lady Waller.'

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CHAPTER XXIX

'WARNED OFF'

'I WISH,' Laurence grumbled, 'that somebody else had this office. Felix would have enjoyed it. There's a sad want of personal consideration about Prophets.'

He was holding in his hand a letter from Claudia.

'Go at once,' she said. 'There is no time to be lost. See the young man Oliver Luttrell, and give him, from me, a final warning. Give it in these words. "Desist immediately. A danger of which you suspect nothing hangs over your head. Desist immediately. There is yet time." If he be still obdurate he must take the consequences.'

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'I don't half like it,' Laurence repeated. 'Felix ought to have been sent.'

For one young man to warn another ought to be an easy thing to do, because one should always be ready to speak up in the cause of virtue. But it is a proceeding which doth always somewhat smack of the Prig. For the professional admonitor, the preacher and teacher by trade, it is without doubt a very easy thing. He is always wagging that forefinger. Nay, some members of the profession are never really happy unless they are brandishing it in the face of a sinner.

Laurence did not like it at all, but still he obeyed and carried the job through. In the discharge of his duty, therefore, he called upon the Demonstrator of Physics at his Laboratory in the City College. The long students' room was empty: none of the men were working at the tables; vacation absolute reigns in September; and the footsteps echoed loudly as Laurence walked down the room towards the Lecture Hall.

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Oliver was in his private room and came out.

'You?' he asked with surprise and small show of cordiality.

'Yes, can I have a few words with you?'

'We can talk here. There are no students.'

Through the open door of the private room, Laurence saw that there was another visitor half sitting, half leaning upon the table—with a cigar of the largest kind between his lips. He recognised the man as the swaggering blustering talker of the Richmond dinner.

'I have been asked to speak to you—to deliver a message.'

'Oh!' Oliver assumed that he came from Cassie and hardened his heart.

'I am told that the message is of the highest importance, but I have not been informed why.'

'You are mysterious.'

'When I tell you that I am a cousin of

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Miss Cassandra Cottle, you will understand that I do not visit you out of any friendliness.'

'You a cousin of Cassie's?'

Laurence inclined his head.

'Since you are Cassie's cousin,' said Oliver, 'you are entitled to an explanation. I was not aware of the relationship. I suppose you have heard what has happened. It is true that we were engaged. It is also true that it was a perfectly foolish engagement for two people with no money at all. Nothing could have come of it. When I quite understood that it was foolish and impossible I broke it off. That was really kinder than keeping it on.'

'You also swore to—to others—that there had been nothing of the kind.'

'That was in order to protect the young lady. And it was at her own request. Do you blame me, I ask, because I did what I could to save a girl from the prejudice which sometimes attaches to one who has had an engagement broken off?'

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'You are doubtless extremely considerate.' Indeed, his manner was that of one who had weighed the matter very carefully. 'However, I am come on the part of Mrs. Laverock.'

'Of Mrs. Laverock? The Prophet person? What have I got to do with that woman? Am I a member of her humbugging Community?'

'A little respect if you please, Mr. Luttrell, for my cousin.'

'Oh! respect—respect,' he repeated losing his temper. 'As much as you like, Mr. Waller, if that is your real name. I deeply respect all your cousins—the clerk and the pew-opener and the telegraph girl and all. And now will you please to go on with your precious message?'

Just then the gentleman in the private room came sauntering out, his hands in his pockets, rolling his shoulders, and stood behind Oliver, as if to protect him.

'My message is a warning.'

'A warning?' Oliver laughed, but he

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turned curiously white and the odd ugly look fell upon his face. 'To warn me—me? Mrs. Laverock is good enough to warn me?—Indeed!—To repent and be converted and to join the Early Church?'

'To warn a gentleman,' said Mr. Harry Stanley with a roll of the shoulder that placed himself offensively close to Laurence. 'I say to warn a gentleman seems to me a thing that wants explanation. I've seen a man warned off a race-course, and another man warned not to turn up the King, and I've seen a man warned by the Beak; but hang me if ever I saw the man take his warning in a friendly spirit. Explain what you mean, Sir, whoever you are. What the Devil do you mean by threatening a gentleman? Explain, Sir,' he added with a fine but common phrase used for the strengthening of speech, 'or we'll know the reason why.'

Laurence looked at him slowly from head to foot. To be thus deliberately estimated makes a man angry. But the Australian was

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a good deal bigger than Mr. Stanley, and was apparently not in the least afraid.

'As for you,' he replied, 'I have no warning for you and I know nothing about you. Your appearance is not scientific, and I should say you would be more at home on a race-course or in a billiard-room than in a Laboratory. But, my swaggering friend, if you think to bustle me I shall take it fighting.'

'Well,' said Mr. Stanley falling back, 'it's no funeral of mine. But I'll stand by and see fair play.'

'You were so good as to promise me a warning,' said Oliver.

'I will read you the words contained in my letter.' Laurence drew it from his pocket and opened it. 'Shall I read it in presence of this—this third person? or shall I communicate it to your private ear? I would advise the latter course, but of course it shall be exactly as you please.'

'I have no secrets from my friend. Read it.'

'Very good. Mrs. Laverock begs me to

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use these words—I read them from her letter —"Desist immediately. A danger of which you suspect nothing hangs over your head. Desist immediately. There is yet time." That is my message, Mr. Luttrell. I know nothing of what it means. But it does look a little like being warned off the course.' He turned to Mr. Stanley. 'Have you any further remark to make, Sir?'

'Nothing,' Mr. Stanley replied. 'It's no fight of mine. If you have read what you were told to read, you may as well go, mayn't you? Might save further row. No good in getting up a row, is there?'

Oliver clearly took the warning like the gentleman on the race-course, in no friendly spirit, to judge from his face.

When the shutting of the door behind Laurence echoed along the walls of the empty room, he caught his brother by the arm.

'Danger!' he cried. 'What danger? Oh! What danger?'

Mr. Harry Stanley made reply slowly.

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'There can be none except from the man who wrote the thing,' he said. 'But consider —why should he let on? He lives by writing things. If it were to get about that he's peached, he would lose his living, and go on the parish. And who would he tell? He can't leave his bed except to pull himself about in a wheel-chair; he's got no friends; he's always been such a desperate bad lot that his relations have long since given him the Boot. Besides, if he was to confess in the middle of Leicester Square he might turn the cops on to me, but not to you. If he was to do that, who could connect me with you? And it's his living, I tell you—his living: his whisky, his baccy, his bed, and his room. Sometimes it's an I.O.U. to write and sign ready for a night when the Juggins gets drunk. You can't dispute your own signature, in the morning when it's shown you. Many a time I've seen that done. Sometimes it's an acceptance—always there's a signature in it. Generally it's a little job: but I've heard of

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one or two big jobs—none so big as ours, to be sure—that have come off by his help. Besides it's his pride, he'll prop himself up in his blessed old chair and look at the two signatures side by side and he'll laugh and swear s' 'elp him if he knows, himself, which is the genuine and which the other. No, my boy, that man can't give himself away. He can't do it. If he wanted to ever so much he couldn't—because he hasn't even got any pals; and the house is full of Italians and foreigners. Cheer up, Oliver. Don't look as if you were going to put in seven years of the best at Portland.'

'Well, it does seem impossible.'

'Seem! It is impossible. . Think, man. You didn't find the thing. You've got nothing in the world to do with it. Mayes found it, or Mayes' Clerk. Mayes, who swears he remembers signing it. Lord! what a jolly old Liar he is, to be sure! Why it's got nothing —just nothing to do with you. Look here. I've been finding out what will happen. The

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Treasury chaps will fight. They're bound to fight. Mayes will have to do the swearing. Not you—nor me—nobody but Mayes. They can't call on anyone else. I found that out beforehand. It's as safe a thing as ever was hatched. Because you see, when the perjury is once afloat, he's bound to stick to it. It's as safe as the Bank of England.'

'Then what does the woman mean?'

'Who is she?'

'They call her the Prophetess, but I never heard of her interfering in this way before. As a rule, it's only speaking in strange tongues and preaching and prophesying at her Chapel.'

'There is something up,' Mr. Stanley replied, reflectively, 'that's pretty sure. You've got no quarrel with the woman, have you?'

'I have never even seen her.'

'We've all got people who owe us a turn, and when they get a chance they will stick in the knife and they will twist it if they can. Is there anybody who's put her up to threatening you?'

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'Why,' said Oliver, 'there's the girl Cassie, her niece. Perhaps she——'

'What is the matter with the girl?'

'Well—there was a little nonsense at one time and I broke it off and she wanted it kept on, that's all.'

'All? Why man, what more do you want? Here's a chap! He goes and throws over a girl and then he is surprised when he gets a nasty one from her friends. Why, man alive, you needn't be uneasy. It is all as right as possible. As for you being warned not to go on as you have been going on, it's part of the usual thing. Danger indeed! They can make a row about the girl if they like. Let 'em—it won't hurt you.'

Oliver breathed more freely. If it was only his treatment of Cassie, why—then—they might indeed do their worst.

'You've done nothing,' his brother continued, 'and you've got nothing to fear. Enough said about that. In three months' time we shall be about as rich as we can

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expect. No more of the old game for me. I shall go and live at Paris or Brussels, or some of those places till the memory has blown over a bit, because, you see, my boy, a gentleman can't live on his wits very well, without having unpleasant things said about him behind his back.'

'If the three months were only over!' Oliver sighed.

'I wish they were: you should soon be out of this mouldy old hole and have your own Chambers and live like a gentleman. I wish they were, Oliver, because I want money pretty bad just now. Last night I played on the square—had to—because there were too many eyes about. I lost thirty-two pounds—I did indeed—and I'm stone-broke. How much did the perjurer lend you?'

'Three hundred, and it's all gone except twenty.'

'Give me ten, and stick him for another hundred. A hundred? Get a thousand if

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you can. And as for danger—why, Oliver, you look white about the gills still.'

'I was thinking again, that if there should be any—But there cannot be—as you say—there cannot be—it is impossible—it is quite impossible.'

Nevertheless he felt ill at ease, so ill at ease that he found it necessary to put the case to himself over and over again in order to strengthen his faith. It was once said by a person of special experience in sinfulness that the greatest punishment awarded to him as a transgressor was the condition of constant fear of being found out, and the necessity of finding continually new assurances for his own mind that discovery was impossible. This was exactly Oliver's case.

Presently he was so borne down with disquiet, in spite of his brother's brave words, that he walked over to the Southwark Bridge Road and sought Mr. Mayes himself. There was nothing in that good man's appearance to justify his fears. Certainly he looked perfectly

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confident—it was while he was still under treatment and confidently expecting a speedy recovery of his memory.

'Mr. Luttrell!' he cried. 'Sir, it does me good to see you. Chevalier, you can go. It does me real good to see you. When I look at you, I sez "three months more" I sez. Three months more and the harvest will come in. There will be a reaping and a gathering. On'y three months more. And you as anxious to begin as me, no doubt. Well, Sir, after the other day's assurances, we may rest easy. That young lady won't claim a farthing of the money, not even if she earns it by changing her name. You are quite safe, Mr. Luttrell.'

'Will you back that opinion by lending me another hundred?'

'To be sure, I will, and another at the back of that if you please. Come in to-morrow morning and I will find the money for you somehow.'

Here was solid safety. What danger could be meant? To find that Mr. Mayes should be

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ready to lend him money—more money—on the security of that document was such a relief as may be felt by one spent with long swimming when he finds his feet at last upon the solid rock.

'Then,' he said, 'you quite remember, now, do you?'

'Lord! Yes,' Mr. Mayes replied sturdily. 'If I didn't I should have a softening. The doctor told me that. I must remember. There was a time, I confess, when it did seem as if I could remember everything in my whole life except that one thing. Overwork, says the Doctor, overwork—strain of the nervous system; too much drink and not enough exercise. Only this morning I seemed to remember quite plain. Just now—but there—it will all come right again. The Doctor says so. A few more electric shocks and then—but oh! it's a most expensive business.'

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CHAPTER XXX

ALL THAT SHE WANTED

FLORRY, rescued and restored, everything blotted out and forgotten, sat alone in her lodgings. She had now, one would think, all that woman can want or pray for. In place of a coarse sack thrown over a heap of shavings, a warm bed with soft clean linen: in place of four bare walls, a furnished room with a maid to wait upon her: in place of starvation, as many square meals a day as she chose to order: and instead of rags, the joy of wearing once more beautiful and becoming clothes. In addition to all this, a release from work, restoration to her people and freedom from anxiety. What more could she desire? Alas! The Gods, who still punish

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us for our sins, sometimes give us all that we want and leave us still unhappy. This poor buffeted creature, so forlorn and lonely, accustomed for so many years to creep along the lowest depths in the Vale of Misery, where the mud is deepest and the thorns are thickest, was suddenly carried clean out of the dreadful place and put into a garden all sunshine and warmth. And yet—yet. When one is always hungry and cold and unsatisfied: so long as one has to ply the needle with feverish haste in order to keep the roof over head and to find the pittance of food which will stave off Death, there is no room for conscience—none at all. The sinner can only be truly awakened to the voice of reproaching conscience after consuming one good dinner at least and receiving an assurance of another and yet another to come after. That is the reason why the good people who desire to convert the Jews provide such a beautiful home—you may see it at Hackney—for the reception and entertainment of Enquirers.

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The greatest criminal goes unrepentant so long as he goes hungry and cold. Thus doth the body still take precedence of the soul. Otherwise, conscience would be stronger than the fear of Death and the sinner would knock off work in order to repent and with resignation lie down to die. In recognition of this great law, the legislators of the future, who will know of no party, and be absolutely indifferent to place, and will no longer eat their words without shame nor stand up before the multitude with brazen brow to denounce what yesterday they glorified—will construct prisons for criminals on the new principle of leaving all the doors unlocked, finding good and abundant food, and offering work on conditions as easy as those which will then prevail outside. There will, of course, be no prison dress, and so strong will be the public feeling on the subject, and so easy the road to repentance and conversion, that the thief and the burglar will sit down side by side to eat and then repent together, and humbly

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pass behind the Veil, and Magdalen herself shall weep for shame to see how her sisters can forgive, though her own conscience doth never cease to upbraid.

This, alas! was the case with Florry. Her nephew came every day to see her: he walked abroad with her: he took her driving: he gave her pretty things such as the poor soul had always loved: he talked to her continually of his mother; he made her talk of the old days when the two were girls together: he warmed her starved heart with love and tenderness: and as for the past—the thirty years since she and her sister parted —and the dreadful misery in which he found her, Laurence said never a word, even of pity. All was to be forgotten. Nay: it was to be as if there was nothing to forget.

Even Cornelia knows not the true history of those thirty years. Certainly it was not the common story of degradation, drink, and horrible companionship. There were no signs of such things in the poor creature's wan face

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and hollow eyes: nor in her conversation: nor in her manner, which was as quick to show feeling as in the days of her innocent youth. Was it for one sin, one impatient rebellion against poverty—that the poor creature was punished so long and so terribly? Let us not ask. Now, at length, she who seemed enlarged, was truly laid in a Prison: even the Prison where there is no punishment but the presence of the past and the thought of what might have been.

Cornelia made haste to call upon her. In her presence Florry sat like a school girl receiving admonition: or like Job receiving the consolations of Zophar the Naamathite.

'You've come back to your family,' she said, frigidly. 'I didn't bring you back. Mind, if I'd been asked for my advice, I should have said that something weekly, which Lucy wouldn't miss, would have been proper. But he thought different. Very well. For the credit of the family I shall

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hold my tongue. Though how you had the face——'

'Laurence made me,' she said meekly.

'Althea knows that you used to go about in rags. They say she will marry Laurence. Then there'll be two—him and her—in Australia, who know. You can't tie up peoples' tongues. Pity you can't, but there it is. Well you'll have to make up a story and stick to it. You must end it up with going poor, else Althea won't believe a word of it.'

'Yes,' Florry murmured. 'Oh! nobody knows except you, Cornelia.'

'There's no call to tell Lucy. Not but she'd have pride enough, now. But there's others to consider. Cassie is going out with you and Felix, and nothing will do but the boy must go too. Cousin Laurence says he shall learn shorthand and become a newspaper man. He talks about sending him to Sydney College; but what's the use of college when you are going to be nothing but a newspaper man? There was one in the Bridge Road, I

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remember, who used to get drunk and beat his wife shameful. Florry, if that boy ever learns the truth, they'll have it out of him and in all the papers, and it will be all over the world in no time.'

'Oh! Cornelia.'

'Claudia said there would be changes. I wonder if she knew or if she prophesied. Women who prophesy get artful. Changes there are, indeed. You've come back, respectable—Flavia is going to marry the Chevalier, and he seventy! They're going to live with Claudia. On the collections, I suppose. There's another Title in the family. More rank, if you care for such nonsense. And now they are at Lucius, wanting to buy the old house and make it an office for the wharf behind. Why, if we sell the house it will be like putting an end to all of us—and who's to have the Punch bowl and the books and the Plate?'

'It would be a terrible pity to sell it,' said Florry.

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'You are going,' this amiable cousin continued, 'among carriage company. At least they tell me so. Don't make your sister ashamed of your manners. Though how you will be able to sit among them after all that's past, I can't think. Some folk will brazen out anything.'

'Oh! Cornelia,' murmured the poor woman.

'Mind, you've had a husband, you're a widow. Who was he? what was he? where did he die? what did he leave you?'

Florry shook her head. The necessity of this invention had not yet occurred to her.

'Make him—your Richard—make him a commercial traveller. That's respectable enough, even for her ladyship, I should hope. A traveller in hops—there's a great hop trade in the Borough.'

'Cornelia, I cannot——'

'You *must*. How else will you get on? Will you go to your sister and those innocent girls and tell them—Thirty years ago——'

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'Cornelia, oh! spare me.'

'You *must* make up your story and stick to it,' she repeated. 'Well, Florry, I've been a good friend to you, and I'm your cousin, and every right to speak my mind. A sad trouble and disgrace you've been to us, but never shall it be said that I lowered the family credit by telling anyone.' She rose and shook her scanty skirts. 'Never. There's a family party to-morrow evening, Cousin Laurence gives it, but Lucius takes the head of the table. You are to come. Oh! yes. As if you'd always been respectable. Laurence wouldn't hear of anything else, of course. I hope Claudia won't begin to prophesy, but there's no telling what she mayn't do—such is her conceit, poor thing! There is to be champagne and the Best Service.'

'I will come if I must,' said poor Florry.

'You can begin about your husband to-morrow evening. Get your hand in. Your husband—your Richard—travelled in hops.

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He died in the North of England, of rheumatic gout. Remember.'

When Cornelia went away Florry sat motionless, her hands clasped, thinking. Generally her thoughts went back to the terrible past, now they were turned upon the future. Alas! It was even more dreadful than the past. She saw herself living with her sister, always a lie upon her lips, dying with that lie unconfessed. No—she would not: she could not. Better even the old life of starvation and misery than thus to live and thus to die.

That evening no one came to see her. She sat quite alone in her room. Laurence was beside Althea while she sang and played. Flavia and the Chevalier walked upon Bank Side hand in hand and made out their future as if the span of threescore years and ten were in his case to be lengthened to the generous allowance accorded to Abraham, in order that the whole world might be converted to the doctrines of the New Humanity

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and the Early Church. Felix sat with Cassie, eloquent over the great things which await the brave and strong in the Austral world.

She was alone. Presently she took pen and paper—she who had written nothing for thirty years—and began a letter. First she wrote slowly and painfully, but soon her thoughts found expression:—

'I am living in a dream. I expect every minute to wake out of that dream and find that I am again in rags, pinched with hunger. For twenty long years I endured this misery, and I cannot understand that it is ended. At first I cried, "Lord, how long?" Then I ceased to look for any end except the end of Death. And now it has ended and yet I cannot feel that with the end of punishment will ever come forgiveness.

'You have made me promise not to speak of the past either to you or to your mother. But how to keep that promise? How can I face Lucy without telling her everything? And

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it would make her so unhappy. Laurence, I *cannot* go with you. Let me stay here in obscurity; only give me a little to live upon. I will take that from you. But is it, after all, a dream? Shall I awake once more to the old misery?

'I have had a dream, Laurence—I put down the pen and leaned back in the chair—a low, soft, easy chair—before the fire which I have lighted because the chill of twenty years is in my very bones. I closed my eyes and I had a dream. I saw two girls—sisters. They were poor, but they resolved never to part. Nothing should part them. Then one married, and at first it seemed as if her fate was going to be miserable indeed. But they remained together, and they went abroad together, and while the married sister became rich and honoured by everybody her sister shared in her good fortune and became also a gracious lady loved and honoured. It was such a beautiful dream that the joy of it awakened me and I remembered that it was a dream,

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because they parted. Oh! they parted—why —why did Lucy let me go?

'The old things come back to me as I now sit alone, old words, old sayings. Oh! I am always in a dream. Just now I heard the voice of my Uncle Vicesimus: he was saying, "I can understand how those who have been injured in this world may easily in the next forgive those oppressors and those who have done them wrong. It is, however, hard to understand how the wrongdoers can forgive themselves." No one was ever so wise as my Uncle Vicesimus. Alas! when he spoke of wrongdoers I thought they were like Indian savages, as far from us and all our ways. There is one way better still. If I were dead.'

When the writer had got thus far the pen dropped out of her hand and she lay back in her chair thinking.

In the days of her wretchedness she had been liable to assault from a certain great temptation, which lies in readiness to spring

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upon all prisoners and captives and all that are desolate and oppressed. I wonder why the Litany has never taken any notice of this temptation. When Florry was attacked by this temptation, whatever the time or season, she would creep out of her lodging and walk with resolution across Tower Hill and so into Thames Street and a place beside the Street she knew so well. She was dragged to this place as a drunkard is dragged to the public-house.

This evening the temptation assaulted her with such force as she had never before felt. Were I Bunyan I should say that Apollyon stood before her armed with dreadful weapons; with rage in his eyes and fire starting from his nostrils. The Temptation might so be described. On the other hand, this woman—sitting alone at night, a terrible past behind, and a terrible future before: thinking with what face she should meet her sister: with what a cloud of falsehoods she should hide the past: with what hypocrisy she should

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sit among the innocent girls—seems a picture more terrible than that of Apollyon. At least one could rush upon that demon and slay or be slain. But there is a Demon who never takes shape, who always hovers around his victims, and never goes away and cannot be assailed by any arms of man. It is far, far more terrible to encounter this Demon of the Valley than the hardest fighting Devil that ever roamed those gloomy depths.

The Temptation came in a voice soft and kindly persuasive. 'My dear,' it said, 'now is the time for you to go. You have rested awhile: you have been clothed and warmed: you can never face your sister: you must not, indeed, think of such a thing. You must now, having been refreshed and restored, give no more trouble to anybody.'

She arose, therefore, being of a soft and yielding disposition, and accustomed to do what she was told. The clock on the mantel-shelf pointed to ten. She took up the letter

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she had written and read over again the last words—

'There is one way better still. If I were dead.'

She put on her jacket and her hat. Then she threw herself on her knees and so remained for five minutes. When she got up she was weeping. She looked about the room as if for the last time, and then moaning and sobbing, she crept down the stairs and out into the street. From Mansell Street to Thames Street is not far: she crossed Tower Hill: on her left rose up the great white Tower, now black in the night. All the way she was led as by a hand and she was exhorted as by a voice.

Beside the long Quay and Terrace of the Custom House, which at night is closed, there are stairs, broad stone stairs, with an iron railing running down them and a little stone landing-place at the top: you reach the stairs through iron gates in the Street. In the daytime there are boatmen hanging about: sur-

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vivors of the Thames watermen. By night there is no one. Great timber piles are stuck into the bed of the river just below these stairs, for the mooring of barges, and when the tide is going up or down the water rushes boiling, sucking, tearing at the timbers as if it would gladly pull them up and hurry them away far out to sea.

Hither she came and here she stood looking into the water, while the voice tempted and urged her to plunge in and so make an end. Only one little step: no more trouble: no more misery: no more tears: no more starvation, cold, rags, and shame. Just one step: the river, the rushing river, the kind and merciful river, the river of rest and sleep, would do the rest.

Think, every night there are these wretches gazing at the river, on every bridge they stand: at the head of all the Stairs: at the wall of all the Embankments. You may even meet them on the River Wall between Barking and Tilbury: they are scattered every-

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where along the river bank. They look with longing yet with terror at the rushing water: and the Tempter sings the same refrain for each.

No one was on the stairs: after dark no one ever is on those stairs: she walked to the head of the steps and caught the iron rail and looked over.

The tide was beginning to run down, but as yet the waters were not hurrying and tearing up or down: they were quietly lapping at the steps, and whispering among the piles: but they were very black: the sky was cloudy: the river was dark.

Florry stood there, her hands catching the rail, leaning and listening to the Voice which invited her to step over and finish.

'See,' it said, softly and affectionately, 'the water is smooth and yielding: it will close over you gently: you shall not be banged and beaten against barges and chains: in a moment you will die. To be devoured in the cool and pleasant water is like falling

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asleep. Farewell, Florry. Farewell—Farewell.'

She would have taken that step. But another voice spoke to her. It was the voice of Lucy.

'Oh! my sister,' it said. 'Oh! my sister—my sister—Florry—you cannot die without a word from me! Wait—wait—wait—till I have time to speak. Florry, wait for only one word of love from me.'

The voice of the Tempter made answer.

'Why wait? She will never know. Nobody will ever know. Lie down—lie down, and fall asleep.' The wash of the water was like caressing music. 'Lie down—lie down—welcome sleep and everlasting rest.'

And then a third voice spoke to her. The voice of Claudia.

'Florry,' she said imperatively, 'go home and get to bed. This minute. My dear, I never mean to let you go again—never—never—not until the Angel of the Lord brings for you the fine linen, clean and white, which is

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the righteousness of the Saints. Go home—Go home!'

She obeyed. She went home crying. And like a child she cried herself to sleep.

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CHAPTER XXXI

'THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT'

'WHY are we here?' As each came in turn they looked about the room and asked each other this question, which no one could answer.

Why were they assembled together? For all were there. Lucius and his daughters: Felix: Althea and her father: and Laurence, who knew no more than the others why he had been ordered to assist at an unknown Function. The Chevalier was also present, but now dressed as an elderly gentleman who respects his personal appearance. Nay, was he not about to become a bridegroom? His hair was cut: he showed a grey moustache and a clean shaven chin: his linen was spot-

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less: his dress was as neat as if he still belonged to the Austrian Cavalry in which he had formerly served: his hands—they were small and pretty hands—were cased in gloves, and his boots—who, to look at these boots, would believe in the old cloth slippers?

They were all present, and no one knew why. Only Claudia was absent, and somehow, without being told, everybody understood that she would presently arrive.

The last to come was Mr. Mayes. He was anxious and gloomy because the medical treatment, which he had now abandoned in disgust, had done him no good, and the young general practitioner had assured him that he might now rely confidently on what his patient called a softening. What is the good of coming into money—getting a whole tenth part of Mr. Norbery's Estate—if you've got to go silly after it like Mr. Backler, deceased? Thus fate still loves to mock mankind.

'Look here, Mister,' he addressed Mr. Indagine. 'You're the Master of this House.'

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'I am not the Master of this House,' Mr. Indagine replied.

'Well, then, perhaps you will tell me what it means.'

'I do not know. I have not asked anybody here. Althea, please let this person understand that I know nothing about it. Oh! dear! dear! what does this interruption mean?'

'Indeed, Mr. Mayes,' said Althea, 'we are all in complete ignorance, but I dare say we shall know before long.'

'I was told that a case was going to be tried.'

'Indeed? Then you know more than anybody else.'

'A case going to be tried,' Mr. Mayes repeated. 'What sort of a case? Is this the County Court? Is it a Police Court? What does it mean?'

'I do not know. None of us know.'

'There's the Chevalier—look at him—dressed up like a gentleman. That's his

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gratitude. While he was with me he dressed like a pauper. What's he doing here? I might summons him for going away without lawful notice—it's illegal dismissal—and I will, too. I suppose he's come into a fortune. Got up from the table the day before yesterday and said he was going. Said he wouldn't stand it any——'

'Hush,' said Flavia. 'Here is Sister Claudia.'

She stood in the open doorway. She was dressed as if for Chapel with her black lace mantilla over her head. She threw it aside and stood for a moment looking round the room just as she did in the Chapel. But there was no smile upon her lips: her face was stern and hard. She was no longer the Prophetess of Mercy, but of Justice. She possessed so large a measure of mesmeric force that she became in the eyes of all what she wished to be. Everybody understood that the occasion was one of the greatest gravity, and that, whatever the nature of the

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Function, this was the President, Judge, or Leader. Wonderful that one so small should possess such power and show so much dignity.

But Flavia's eyes flashed. 'At last,' she whispered to Cassie. 'At last! Oh! my dear. You shall be revenged. The Chevalier has done it all. He's the only one—and, oh! doesn't he look noble?'

Claudia took her seat solemnly at the head of the table in the Doctor's armchair. The others gathered about the table, except Mr. Indagine, who took his own armchair and sat apart, appearing to take no interest in the proceedings.

'Brothers and sisters,' said Claudia, throwing her veil over her shoulders and raising her face suddenly after her manner before the congregation. Like all who possess the divine gift of speech she made every person present believe that he himself was the special object of her attention. 'Brothers and sisters, I have asked you to come together this day in

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order to try a criminal before his crime has been legally committed—that is, before the law has been able to take cognizance of it. The guilty person will be here in a few minutes. I have warned him—once, twice, thrice—that he desist from his evil ways. Since nothing else will serve, he shall be admonished in the sight of all, and his crime proclaimed before his own friends. This will be better for us and more wholesome for him than that he should fall into the hands of Justice. In this our Church, we do not hale men before magistrates, nor do we punish them at all save with the outpouring of Love. If men will commit injustice upon us they may do it without fear of the law and its penalties. But we seek to prevent them if we can by other means. The wrong-doer, when he leaves this room, will not be followed by the Law. Nay, if he choose to run further risk, he may continue in his wrong-doing. But his sin will have found him out, and he shall stand confessed in his true light before

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you all. I expect Oliver Luttrell to appear before us all.'

She ceased.

Then everybody gasped, because now everybody, except Mr. Mayes, understood who was the wrong-doer. And Cassie caught her sister by the hand.

'Don't let them,' she whispered. 'Don't let them, Flavia.'

'It isn't about you, Cass,' her sister replied. 'It is a very different thing. But he will be punished for his behaviour—no one was ever worse punished.'

Then the door opened and Oliver himself appeared.

As soon as he stepped within the room Felix placed himself, perhaps accidentally, at the door. Certainly it would have been a big and strong man who could force his way through a door barred by Felix.

Oliver looked about him in astonishment. He met faces which were turned upon him with hostility, wonder, or curiosity. Althea's

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eyes were grave: Cassie hung her head: Laurence looked hard: Lucius wondering: Mayes—what had Mayes to do with Cassie?—bewildered: the Chevalier, calm and cold. But when he caught Flavia's eyes he read in them exultation and revenge. It was, then, that business of Cassie's, after all.

'What does this mean?' he asked. 'I am come in obedience to a mysterious note inviting me to assist at something—I am not told what. Are we rehearsing a Comedy?'

'No,' said Claudia, sternly.

'Let us get on, then,' said Oliver. 'I have not learned any part, whatever it is. So I will be a spectator.'

'Young man'—no Judge could have been more impressive—no forefinger ever lifted could be more terrible, and yet she was only a little woman—'you have been warned. You have been warned three times. You have been solemnly enjoined to turn away from your wickedness—but you have hardened your heart. Any one who was not

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rushing upon his fate would have known that his wickedness had been discovered—yes—the whole of the plot—the whole of the conspiracy. I have brought you here, therefore, in order that your friends—those who have loved you—those who have built the highest hopes of your future—those who have believed you to be an honourable man—may learn what manner of man you have become, and of what wickedness you are capable. You are here in order that the last step of that wickedness may be prevented. You are here, also, in order that you may have a loophole of escape.'

Oliver turned white. But he did not speak. The suddenness of this public attack took away the power of speech. His heart was truly hardened, and his eyes blinded. For he still imagined, in spite of this plainness of speech, that the business was that concerning Cassie. This he still believed, although the presence of the man Mayes should have made him understand.

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'As,' he said, 'I am not disposed to play any further part in this folly, I shall leave you.'

He turned to go, but Felix stood before the door.

'No,' said the strong young man.

'If I am kept by force,' said Oliver, 'I must stay, I suppose. Go on, therefore, with your business.' He took a chair and sat at the lower end of the table, and tried to look unconcerned.

'Nobody knew,' Claudia replied, 'except yourself and myself and one other. But since nothing else will turn you aside we must take that way. Chevalier, will you tell everybody what you have told me?'

Oliver looked up sharply. What on earth had this man to do with Cassie?

The Chevalier stepped to the table.

'Sister Claudia,' he said. 'For two years and more—until the day before yesterday—I was in the service of Mr. Joseph Mayes.'

'You were,' said Mr. Mayes huskily.

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Something disagreeable, he now suspected, was about to be revealed.

'I was in the service of Mr. Joseph Mayes,' the Chevalier repeated, in his soft and gentle voice. 'I was his clerk, his cook, and his messenger. Before I was so fortunate as to meet with this employment I lived in a house near Soho Square, filled with foreign people —Italians, Swiss, and others—for the most part as poor as myself. Some of us lived two and three together: in one room of the house, however, there lived by himself—an Englishman. He had once been a lawyer and—I know not—perhaps a man of consideration. For something that he had done he had lost his position and his friends. Everybody in the house had lost those. But this man had lost his honour as well.

'He was paralysed, and sat all day long in a chair with a table before him: he could wheel himself about in his chair: if anybody would sit and drink with him, or play cards with him, he was happy. Sometimes men

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came to see him on business, and after that he would keep the door locked. Everybody knew that he was engaged upon the devil's work, but it was no one's business to interfere.

'After I came to Southwark upon my new service I used to go to Soho on Sundays in order to see these my former friends and fellow exiles. My principal friend was one who, like myself, was once a gentleman of Hungary. He is now a waiter at a Club where they dance and feast and gamble all night. For these revellers he runs about opening bottles, and carrying suppers. In the daytime he sometimes plays cards with this Englishman out of kindness. One day, not long ago, the Englishman drank so much that he fell asleep. On the table lay some papers which he had been writing—my friend saw on that paper a name he knew—because it was the name of my employer—the name of Joseph Mayes.'

'My name—mine?' cried Mr. Mayes. 'I

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don't remember.' He groaned, thinking this was another symptom. 'That's the second thing I can't remember.'

'My friend therefore copied the paper and gave me a copy. It is here.' The Chevalier pulled an envelope out of his pocket and laid it on the table. 'Then my friend watched and discovered the man who employed this clever writer, and when he gave me the paper and told me the story he offered to show me that man if I would go to the Club with him.'

Flavia followed the story with breathless interest, inclining her head at every point as if to score another. If the Chevalier from time to time turned to her she smiled and nodded approvingly.

'The paper was a very curious paper indeed. It was nothing less than the will of a dead man, rich while he was living, drawn up six or seven years after he was dead.'

Oliver glanced round quickly. No sentinel on duty was ever more conscientious

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than Felix in guarding that door. He leaned his chin upon his hand again and listened without any further outward emotion at all, except that his eyes shifted uneasily towards Mr. Mayes, who listened with open mouth, breathing heavily.

'The paper interested me so much that I borrowed the dress of a waiter and I went with my friend to the Club. Presently, when the theatres were over and the members began to come in, the man who employed the skilled pen arrived, having with him two ladies and a gentleman. My friend and I waited upon them and gave them their supper and their champagne. When the supper was finished the ladies danced a little and went away. Then the two went to the card-room and played all night. Yes: I waited on them all night long in the card-room. The gentleman who engaged the services of the skilled writer is named Mr. Harry Stanley, and the other gentleman, his companion, you see before you—he sits at the end of the table.'

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Oliver made no sign of having heard. But Mr. Indagine at this point sat up, murmuring 'Stanley?—Stanley?'

'So I learned,' he said, 'what had been done. I read the copy which Sister Claudia has before her, until I knew it by heart. And I waited. Now mark. One day, four weeks ago, I was at work for my master, Mr. Mayes, sorting and reading papers for him. He was out. This young gentleman, Mr. Oliver Luttrell, called and asked to see him. He held in his hand, trying to conceal them behind him, a bundle of papers. He did not go away immediately, but he engaged me in talk, still trying to hide this packet of papers —one has not been a conspirator for nothing —I became suspicious—I pretended to observe nothing. I pretended to turn my head, I pretended not to see when he laid that packet among the papers on the table. I even helped him by covering them carelessly with another bundle. And then he went away. I took up his packet: I turned down

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one corner, and I wrote thereon an account of how the paper came on the table in small characters and in my own language. There it will be found. Now, Sister Claudia, open the paper on the table and let us know what it is.'

'It is called the last Will and Testament of Samuel Norbery. Shall I read it?'

'It needs not. Word for word it is the same as the paper which I found, and Mr. Mayes thinks is a genuine will. Yes—the forger of that will is the paralysed Englishman. He was employed by Mr. Harry Stanley, and his accomplice is Mr. Oliver Luttrell.'

Oliver lifted his head and spoke quietly and with perfect self-possession.

'This is a very pretty story, indeed: and craftily put together. Two things shall confound you. First, who is this Mr. Harry Stanley, of whom I know nothing, that he should forge a will leaving Mr. Norbery's Estate to his niece? What knowledge should he have of Althea? And next, the will itself: Mr. Mayes remembers and can swear to the

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signature. As for your copy, of course you must have made it yourself. That is all I have to say.'

But the Poet spoke.

'Oliver, you had once a brother named Stanley. It is your own name.'

And Laurence spoke. 'If the man Stanley is a handsome, black-haired man with a loud laugh and a swaggering manner, I have seen him twice in Mr. Luttrell's company, both at Richmond and in his laboratory.'

Oliver returned to his old position, chin in hand, looking straight before him. And he made no further sign of being moved.

Then Mr. Mayes arose and spoke.

'Chevalier,' he asked humbly, 'is it true that you saw him put the papers on the table?'

'It is true.'

'Is it true that you have a copy of the Will made by your friend before ever it was laid upon the table?'

'It is quite true.'

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'Then, Chevalier, why didn't you tell me so at the very beginning?'

'Because you said that you remembered your own signature.'

Then Mr. Mayes made confession. Quite like an Early Christian, as Flavia afterwards observed, he confessed openly.

'I've been a fool,' he said. This, indeed, was the sum of his confession. But he went on to show the nature and the extent of his folly. 'I never dreamed that the will was a forgery, and I thought I ought to remember it. The more I tried the less I could remember it. I was ashamed to own up. I went to a doctor and all—they gave me shocks between the nape of my neck and the tongue: it cost me six guineas a-day, and they cut off my drink. When I wouldn't go on any longer they said I should get worse and worse and have a softening and die!—all because I could not remember what never happened. Forger! Villain! Forging Villain!' he roared, turning fiercely upon Oliver.

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Cassie shrieked and hid her face in her hands.

'Easy, man,' said Felix. 'You shall have it out with him somewhere else. Easy!'

Mr. Mayes checked himself.

'Yes,' he said. 'Elsewhere. He's borrowed four hundred pounds of me, besides what he's made me pay the Doctors. Yes —I'll have it out with him elsewhere. He shall have no peace till I've got it out of him. Ha!' Mr. Mayes plunged his hands into his pockets. With some men this action signifies resolution. 'Well, I haven't got a softening, and there was nothing to remember. Mind that—I know now, if there had been, I should have remembered it. It's all true. The Chevalier has his faults, but he can't make up lies.'

'Sir,' said the Chevalier, 'I thank you.'

'No—he can't—I believe every word of it. If all foreign noblemen are like the Chevalier, the sooner we bring 'em over in a lump and make 'em clerks the better.'

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'Again, I thank you,' said the Chevalier, gravely inclining his head.

'And I haven't got a softening after all,' he sighed heavily. 'As for the precious will—here it is.' He drew it out of his pocket and threw it upon the table. 'I was going to give it to a lawyer this very day. Now I'm prepared to swear that I never did sign that will, and anybody that likes may give it to his lawyer; I wash my hands of it. I've been led to believe that I should get wonderful great things out of it—but what's all the money in the world if you go silly? And as for you—' he turned again upon Oliver, 'I will—I will—I will wait for you outside.'

He left them, Felix opening the door for him and resuming his position as Inner Guard or Tyler.

'One thing more,' said the Chevalier. 'I should like to read the writing of which I have spoken. It is here.' He turned over a corner of the will and showed it clear and small. 'It is written in my own language.

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Listen. "On this day, August the 15th, 1887, this document was brought to the house and laid upon the table by Mr. Oliver Luttrell, secretly as he thought." That is all.'

Oliver at this point lifted his head and took the paper from the Chevalier. He looked at the writing. He then took up the copy and compared the two with the appearance of one not greatly interested. His curiosity satisfied, he rolled both together, placed them in his breast-pocket, buttoned his coat and resumed his former attitude. No one interfered. The action was understood to be a finish to the whole business. There was an end. Nothing more would be heard of that will.

It was at this point that the Doctor arrived.

'Why,' he cried, 'here is a goodly assemblage. Oliver, my dear boy,' he clapped his adopted son on the shoulder, 'we haven't seen you for ages. Are you giving them a lesson

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on Science? Why are you all gathered together?'

'We have now finished, Dr. Luttrell,' said Claudia. 'Everybody will go away. The Court has been held. The Sentence of the Court is that everything be forgotten that can be forgotten. In our Church we do not only forgive; we forget: we grieve and pray for such as offend, and we forget. In this matter let us all be Early Christians: let us pray and hope and forget.'

'Why?' said the Doctor, 'what has happened? Of late, something new happens every day. Is this some device of yours, Laurence?'

'No, Sir: this was none of my handiwork.'

'Cassie,' Flavia whispered, 'you see him at last as he is. Now you won't fret for him any longer. Oh! you can't—the wretch! You are revenged, my dear.'

'Let us all go,' said Laurence.

The last to go were Althea and Cassie. These lingered.

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'Oliver,' said Cassie, holding out her hand, 'I am going away. I am going to Australia. Let us part friends.'

He refused with an angry gesture.

'You will never see me again, I think. Let us shake hands.'

'No,' he said roughly.

'Give her your hand, Oliver,' said Althea. 'Oh! Let her at least forgive you, Oliver. It is farewell to the old Love.'

'The last illusion we shall destroy will be the illusion of Love,' he remembered his own words.

'Go,' he said, hoarsely.

The girls obeyed, with tears in their eyes.

There were left in the room none but the Doctor, Mr. Indagine, and Oliver.

'What is it, my dear boy,' said the Doctor. 'There is some kind of trouble, what is it?'

'My friend and brother,' said the Poet, laying his hand upon the Doctor's shoulder, 'we have been dreaming. It is time that we should be awakened.'

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'What is it?'

'Remember how you started twenty years ago with a great scheme. You brought home a gipsy child. You would educate him. All the hereditary tendencies should be so many steps by which he should rise. You would teach him no Religion: there is, you said, so strong a Natural Religion that he will learn it for himself: and from the Natural he would rise to the Spiritual. That seemed certain to you. You would bring him up with no illusions. He should learn the naked truth: every other man is, you would teach him, a natural enemy: the root of everything out of which the loftiest spiritual life springs is the simple Law of Self Preservation. You remember what you thought would happen. As humanity itself, you said, starting with unawakened brain and nothing but a hunting instinct and obedience to that Law, is destined to rise to such a height as we cannot even yet conceive, so the individual himself may represent mankind and in his own life rise to

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the loftiest Spiritual level, if he can start unencumbered with illusions and superstitions. By means of reason and science your pupil, your adopted son, would pass through Natural to Spiritual religion. On the foundations of Self Preservation he should rise to Self Sacrifice. Was not this your dream?'

'Well?' But he looked curiously at his adopted son, who sat in the same position with hard set face.

'You think still, that it has succeeded?'

'I find my boy,' said the Doctor, laying his hand on his son's arm—but Oliver shrank back—'wholly given up to Science. He is feeling his way through Science to the higher Spiritual Levels of which we sometimes talk. He leads the simple life. His heart is set upon the highest things.'

'Oliver,' said the Poet, 'I leave you to your father. Tell him what you please. No one else will tell him anything.'

They were left alone.

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Oliver lifted his head. The Doctor was gazing upon him with troubled eyes.

'Speak, my son,' he said.

'I am not your son,' Oliver replied, gently. 'Let us cherish no more illusions. I am a gipsy—always a gipsy—a scientific gipsy—the only gipsy who has ever become a Fellow of the Royal Society. But first of all, a gipsy. I have found my own people who, for that matter, have never lost sight of me. You think that I have been living the simple life—meaning the temperate and abstemious life. On the contrary, of late I have been getting as much enjoyment out of my life as I could afford. You think that my mind is wholly set upon science. On the contrary, it is now wholly occupied by contrivances for securing more pleasure. Science, I begin to understand is only valuable as it affords the means of prolonging life, preventing disease and extending the field of enjoyment. Culture is only valuable as it quickens the senses. We have but one life: let us make, if we can,

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every moment in it a moment of delight: let us snatch what we can before we die. You thought I should attain to Natural Religion first, and what you call Spiritual Religion next. I have not got to the first and I don't know what you mean by the second. You have always wearied me with your talk of Natural and Spiritual Religion. They are dreams—like your doctrine of Self Sacrifice; they are dreams and shadows. We are all fighting and trampling on each other: the strong men join together and make the weak work for them. The secret of life is to join the strong men and help to keep down the weak. In order to get the means of more animal enjoyment I have attempted a little manœuvre which has failed. They would call it a crime, I believe, but it would have injured no one, and it very nearly succeeded. Perhaps some one else will tell you the details, if you wish to hear them. Can I say any more? I am sorry,' he added, 'for your sake, that your experiment has failed. Looking back,

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in cold blood, I think you will own that it never had a chance of success. I say that I am sorry. You have been very kind. You deserved to succeed. You will acknowledge, at least, that I pretended, in order to please you, that you had succeeded.'

As for what the Doctor said in reply, that shall remain unrecorded.

Oliver, ten minutes later, passed out of the house and stood in the street.

Before him stood Mr. Mayes with arms outstretched.

'Give me back my money,' he thundered.

Oliver turned to the left with the air of one who neither sees nor hears, and so reached Bank Side. Mr. Mayes followed him, thundering 'Pay me—Pay me—Give me back my money.'

He followed Oliver as far as the Falcon Wharf. There he desisted, promising, however, and loudly repeating his promise, that he would call at the Laboratory day after day, every day, if it was forty

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years, there to demand his money until he was paid.

He did call the very next day—and every day afterwards for a fortnight—but he could not find Oliver.

When the Professor of Physics of Gresham College came back at the beginning of term he found that his Demonstrator had resigned —leaving a letter. Most important business, he said, had called him away: business which would keep him away for five or six months. Therefore he must regretfully resign. It is rumoured that Oliver is now residing at Heidelberg. It is certain that Mr. Mayes has not received his money.

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE HONOUR OF THE FAMILY

EVERYBODY knew that the Supper was provided by Laurence, in honour of the reunion and before the final dispersion of the Family. Althea and her father were bidden to the Feast—that was understood as a sign or token that they were shortly to become more closely connected with the Family: the Doctor was not going to be present—this indicated the complete rupture of possible relations with Oliver: the Chevalier was invited—this marked his formal reception into the Family. Claudia, after eighteen years, would break bread once more with her sister: Florry, after nearly thirty years, would again sit at meat with her cousins: the Banquet should

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be interesting and even imposing. Up to a certain extent it was both. If that was all, the story of the evening could have been told in very few words. But it was not all, as you shall hear; and the end of that Banquet was, as happens to many Banquets, very different from what had been anticipated. We sit down, for instance, at the Banquet of Life. When we rise from that (occasionally) protracted Feast, with its many courses and its thousand dishes, how has it fared with us?

I cannot suppose that Bank Side, even in the days when the Academy was young and there were no wharves or barges, but only houses of substantial merchants on the Bank, ever saw so splendid a feast as this. One need only suggest its material nature—the chicken, wild duck, plover, ham, tongue, salad, mayonnaise, partridge, jelly, cream, ice cake, peaches, grapes, pears, plums, bananas, pine-apples, and other things which go to make a princely Feed in the month of September: one need only hint at the Champagne and the tall

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red bottle and the short square bottle and the flask in basket-work. But the setting forth of these good things! That, indeed, was the glory and the Triumph of the Feast. Only to contemplate the mounting, so to speak, of the piece brought tears to Flavia's eyes and would have brought pride unutterable to Cornelia but for one thing.

It is only your old families who have taken root in one spot and lived there for a hundred years at least, who can do this kind of thing properly. Of course, you can get things—stage things—properties—plated things, from the Confectioner. But there are things which no Confectioner can find even in imitation or plate. This family possessed, besides a Best Bedroom, a Best China Service. Its existence was well known: it lay in a certain closet where for forty years and more, since in fact the Christening of Lucius, it had lain wrapped and covered over with napkins. Now it was produced. The girls saw it for the first time: a service in pink and gold: chicken and ham

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lay in the long dishes: peas and beans and potatoes were served in the vegetable dishes: its sacred plates were placed at every cover. There was also, in the same closet, the family plate—a chest containing spoons and forks of real silver, not trumpery plate. These came forth after long disuse, and were beheld by the family for the first time. They were unfortunately a good deal worn, because the first Academician loved splendour and used these things every day in reckless fashion. There was also, still from the same closet, a Service of fine linen, table cloth and napkins, of splendour so dazzling that every one's heart was uplifted with pride. In the centre of the table was the punch bowl filled with iced claret cup, the silver ladle swimming on the surface; the silver candlesticks lighted the feast. When Lucius stood at his place and surveyed the table before he took his seat, he felt that now for the first time he realised the respectability of the family of which he was the Head.

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He pronounced a benediction of the ancient kind, which had been used in the family in the days of fatness on those great occasions which formerly had been more frequent. It was not the hurried formula which serves very well for cold boiled mutton, but a Prayer before a good Feed. His sisters remembered it and acknowledged the fitness of the occasion.

Then he sat down and looked about him with cheerful eyes. On his right, in the post of honour, sat his newly recovered cousin, Florry. She was agitated: the greatness of the welcome made her colour come and go. With this suffusion and her soft eyes which lifted shyly and drooped again, her shapely head and her still abundant hair, she looked far younger than her cousins. And in her dainty dress and the way she wore it, there showed the girl as she was remembered. Her nephew sat next to her grave and anxious. From time to time she took his hand beneath the table and held it as if for protection. Opposite sat Cornelia in her Sunday black,

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less rusty than the week day wear: her face was set severe. Even the sight of the Best Service could hardly make her smile. Next to Cornelia sat Mr. Indagine, and Claudia next. The young people, including the Chevalier, filled the lower end of the table.

As the banquet proceeded, everybody looked happy except Cornelia and her cousin Florry. The one grew harder to look at, and the other more agitated and trembling. Lucius, with imagination free, saw himself once more honourably placed upon the Higher Branch. Cassie seemed to forget for the evening her faithless and worthless lover —indeed, there needed but separation and change to make her forget him altogether. Claudia was no longer the Prophetess, but the sister of the House.

In his place at the Head, Lucius surpassed the highest expectation that could have been formed of him, though his experience of Banquets was scanty indeed. In recollection of some festivity long ago while his grand-

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father was still living, and in imitation of that venerable scholar, he invited everyone in turn to take wine with him: on the former occasion the punch bowl contained a more generous potation than iced claret cup—but there was Champagne. And while he drank he talked continually, now to his cousin, now to Claudia, and now to the table, so that the others presently disregarded him, and there arose a susurrus or gentle murmur of talk like the washing of the rising tide among the pebbles.

'This is an occasion,' he said, 'over which my father would have rejoiced. Perhaps—nay, we should not doubt it—he is looking down from somewhere which commands a view. We must not suppose that when we go away from this world we carry with us no further interest in those we love. That were a poor and low estimate of human love. He rejoices to see us welcome this evening a cousin from across the sea—whose feet have been upon Antipodean shores—the son of one

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whom we have often welcomed beneath this roof at Sunday tea—one whose husband has been ennobled, raised to an exalted rank, by special command of Her Majesty the Queen. We welcome also another cousin who has been separated from us for years too many for us to count. She has come back to us and we shall not lose sight of her again, unless she joins her ladyship across the sea. Cousin Florry, I drink your health.'

'Her husband,' said Cornelia, speaking in snaps, 'her Richard, travelled in hops. He had a large connection in the North of England.'

Florry coloured deeply and hung her head and caught Laurence by the hand. He began to wish that he had not invited his aunt to this Banquet. Cornelia's manner warned him of rocks ahead.

'Wherever you have been, my dear cousin,' Lucius continued, 'it is pleasant to find that you have not forgotten your connection with this honourable and highly esteemed family.'

'Her Richard,' Cornelia continued, 'was

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not, himself, so honourably connected. But he was justly esteemed.'

Florry inclined her head and gasped.

'You eat nothing, my dear Aunt,' said Laurence.

'I cannot eat, my dear,' she whispered. 'I am choking. Oh! will she never stop?'

'Florry,' Cornelia went on, 'you will go out to Lucy—to Lady Lucy—to Lady Waller, your sister. To me, I confess, she is always Lucy, and I cannot, of course, forget the old days when she was a daily dressmaker and glad to get it, and you were in the trimmings.'

'Cousin Cornelia,' said Laurence, with the smile which hides admonition, 'the day of small things may be remembered—indeed, it is the one thing which is always remembered—but we do not want to talk about it when we are rejoicing in the day of success, do we? Let us for the moment forget the daily dressmaker and the trimmings.'

'Lucy has gone up,' Cornelia replied, 'but I remain where I was. I suppose I cannot be

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expected to pretend that I have gone up. I was in the Church when she went away, and I am in the Church still. But of course it is your supper, Laurence, and you have a perfect right to rebuke your elders.'

'My dear cousin,' said Laurence, again smiling, but with grave eyes, 'I was only anxious not to have memories revived which might be unpleasing.'

'I was going to say,' Cornelia explained coldly, 'that when my cousin Florry goes to her sister she will naturally have a good deal to tell her about her husband—who travelled in hops.'

Claudia looked round. She saw her sister nodding at Florry in a meaning manner and observed a look of admonition in her face. She also saw that Florry was visibly distressed and that Laurence was anxious. These things made her watchful.

'We have also'—it was again the voice of Lucius and he was enjoying the sound of it as much as if he had been Chairman in a

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Lodge of the Ancient and Honourable Order of Antediluvian Buffaloes. 'We have also to welcome among us this evening one who has long shed lustre upon the Bank for his distinguished services in the cause of Freedom, even though Freedom for the time had to—to knock under. It was Freedom, as the Poet Campbell said, who shrieked when the Chevalier fell. Happily, he got up again. Chevalier, I drink to you. Let us all drink to the Chevalier. We are indeed proud to think that one of this house is about to contract an Alliance with a hero of Freedom, whose exploits will certainly occupy a page—or half a page—of immortal history. The Chevalier,' Lucius explained, as if the circumstance must be most gratifying to a soldier, 'has run away from four pitched battles.'

The Chevalier, who in his new clothes really looked the very cleanest, neatest and best groomed old gentleman in the world, bowed gravely to Lucius, and turning to Flavia raised her hand and kissed her fingers. The

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girl reddened with pleasure and pride: her eyes softened: the demurity went out of her face: her nose grew smaller: her lips curved in the most lovely and most gracious smile: she looked like her sister, or like Claudia: or like Florry—so great is the power of Love in the improvement of a girl's looks. If it were not for that most unfortunate arrangement of nature which takes away a woman's beauty at an age varying from twenty-five to forty-five, I am convinced that one might turn the plainest damsel into a Helen of Troy only by subjecting her to a course of happy and devoted love. That is to say, she must be loved as much as she must love: and the double event, according to the French Proverb, does not always come off.

'Althea,' Laurence whispered, 'will you take me out once more, alone, in your boat?'

'If you would like it,' she replied, with a conscious blush.

'To-morrow, in the evening, if the day is bright, I want one more sunset on the river. You came to me, Althea, out of the Sunset.'

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This from a young man who had, as yet, said not one word of love. But they understood.

'You were a goddess, you know, clothed in golden and crimson vapours. Can I ever forget how you floated down straight out of Heaven?'

'Oh!' she murmured. 'You must not talk like that.'

'There is money in hops,' said Cornelia, fixing her cold eyes again upon poor Florry.

'Lots of money! Lots of money!' said Laurence, quickly.

'A glass of wine with you, Mr. Indagine' —the recollection of his grandfather's stately politeness made Lucius the most attentive of hosts. 'It is delightful to think that you are with us—you and Althea—on such an occasion as this. Althea, my dear child, a glass of wine with you. Fill her glass, Laurence. Let it be champagne, the wine that loosens girls' tongues and makes their cheeks glow.' Heavens! How did Lucius acquire the Ana-

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creontic vein? 'Your health, Althea! Mr. Indagine, to you! It has been our happy lot, Sir, to converse almost daily, when the length of day permits, upon the Bank. We have added a chapter to the Literary History of London. As Boswell is remembered by his friendship for Dr. Johnson, so shall I, perhaps, go down to posterity as the lawyer who lightened the conversation hours of the Poet.'

'You shall, my friend,' said Mr. Indagine, much moved, and perhaps *perfusus mero*, warmed with unaccustomed wine, 'you shall. As soon as my poems are ready for publication, I shall begin my autobiography. The chapter on my second Period—that of Seclusion—will mainly dwell on the development of the secluded poet. But they will also contain many delightful reminiscences of yourself and your charming family, of whom I shall ever retain a most pleasing recollection.'

Could anything be grander?

'Cassie,' Felix whispered, 'you are going

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out with Laurence. So am I; so is Sempronius; I believe everybody is going out. It's splendid! I'm to go up country to Sir David's cattle station to learn the business. What are you going to do?'

'I don't know.'

'No more photographs, I reckon. And, I say, Cassie, you've forgotten that little black beast and forger. You can't think about him any more after all that's come out. You'll let another fellow have a chance, won't you?'

'Don't, Felix.'

'We could have wished,' Lucius continued, 'that the Doctor had been with us. We seem incomplete without the Doctor. Late events —most surprising and distressing events— have shaken him. He excused himself. Rejoicing, he said, was not in his way just at present. Let us say no more about this unhappy business. Felix, my dear boy, a glass of wine with you! When do you start for Australia?'

'In hops'—Cornelia again fixed searching

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and admonishing eyes upon her cousin—'in hops money may be lost as well as made. Your Richard, I believe, lost his all.'

'Never mind family misfortunes just now,' said Laurence, again interfering.

'This will be our last gathering under the old Roof,' Lucius went on. 'I kept this communication for the last. Children, I have to tell you that we are going to part with the House. Yes—an old house, like a Title, holds a family together. When we give up Bank Side we are dispersed: we shall be like the Ten Tribes, who are scattered over the whole world and lost. The family will be dispersed and perhaps lost. Future ages will ask where are the descendants of Vicesimus Cottle. Like Shakespeare, he will seem, perhaps, to have left none. I have been offered a good sum of money for the place, which is to be turned into an office. When we go, the last of the private families of the Bank will have disappeared, and at evening it will be left silent, with the scrap-iron and the

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broken glass. The Academy will be finally extinguished. As for me, I have taken counsel with Laurence, and I have come to the serious resolution of going with him to this new world of the South. In my forty-sixth year I shall become an Emigrant. 'The word Emigrant,' he added, reflectively, 'has always suggested to me a family sitting on their boxes and tea-kettles, crying. Laurence, however, tells me that we shall not emigrate exactly in that way.'

'He's going, too,' said Felix. 'We are all going; I told you so.'

'Laurence assures me that an intimate acquaintance with the practice of the Higher Branch will command a—a place, though the dignified custom of the Guarantee does not perhaps prevail. Well, children, all is determined. Flavia and the Chevalier will live with Claudia. Cornelia will take care of the Best China, the Plate, the Punch bowl, and the Books until we can have them sent out. Perhaps she will herself bring them out.'

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'No,' said Cornelia, 'my place is in the Church.'

'She won't give up the Body,' Felix whispered.

'The only thing that troubles me,' said Lucius—'Mr. Indagine, another glass of wine with you! Althea, my dear—no more wine?—the only thing is that our friends will be left behind. Cassie, how shall we get on at all without Althea?'

'It is for us as well,' said the Poet, 'to make confession. I, too, am going out. Yes. No public announcement of this impending change has been made, and I confess that I do not like to think of what Fleet Street will say. But I clearly understand that it is the best thing I can do. I have gone back to the world. I have prepared my new volume of poems. But the old life has become impossible to me. And as for the new life, I cannot begin afresh. London has grown too big. It was always a terrible place to me, and now it has become much more terrible.

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The wits have left their old haunts and have gone to clubs. Laurence has taken me to his club, and I confess that I found the atmosphere cold when I remembered the taverns. I have been reading new books, and I find another school of poetry, which I hardly understand. Their metres are strange, and there is a dexterity—sometimes I wonder at my own popularity, and I doubt whether my new book will succeed. If you all go away and leave me, what should I do? So I, too, am going with you. I have taken counsel with Laurence. He loves my talk, and I his society. After the last three months I could not, indeed, get along without him. Althea consents to go, and my young friend shall continue to enjoy my conversation.'

Althea blushed because Claudia smiled.

'Oh! whispered Cassie, 'we shall all go together, and we shall not be parted, Althea. But I knew very well, all along,' she added in a lower voice.

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'It will be lonely when you are all gone,' said Claudia. 'I have been parted from you, but in spirit I was always with you. Felix told me everything. Well, I cannot leave my people, and I shall have Flavia.'

'It has always been lonely for me in the Church,' said Cornelia. 'Nobody ever comes inside the Church, and I have nothing else to do than to think. I shall think'—I do not know whether this was malignity or stupidity —'how Florry is laughing and singing with you, quite as she used to do when she was a girl. My husband, as everybody knows, was only a verger, and her Richard travelled in hops. I'm a widow, and thankful for my present place. Florry's a widow going to live in the lap of luxury with my Lady Lucy——'

Florry sprang to her feet. 'Let me go! Let me go!' she cried, as Laurence caught her hand. 'Let me go!' and rushed out of the room.

'Cousin'—but Florry was already out of

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the room—'remember!' Cornelia sank back white and terrified.

'You have been too much for her, sister,' said Claudia, 'with harping upon her husband. She's nervous to-day—I've been watching her. She's shaking all over, and she didn't take any supper. But she was always a small eater. She will come back presently, when she has had her cry. It was Florry's way when she was a little girl to burst into tears and go away till she could leave off. We are all three widows, Cornelia, and I for one shouldn't like to be talked to about my poor Laverock. Let us wait. Sit down, Laurence, she is only gone to have a good cry.'

'She promised, faithful, that she would remember,' Cornelia murmured.

'Poor Florry!' Claudia went on. 'Who knows what her life may have been? Yet she looks almost too young. Something is going to happen when a woman of fifty looks like a girl of twenty. Sister Priscilla, who

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died the week before last at eighty, looked a girl again half an hour before she died. Some of the brethren said it was because she was already permitted to put on the face of an angel; but perhaps not, because she looked old again in the coffin. Florry's face reminded me of old times. Go on talking, Lucius. Florry will soon come back again. And leave off about her Richard, Cornelia—and—oh! good gracious, what is this?'

Florry had returned. She stood before hem, again, but changed. She had torn off her black silk dress and I know not what beside, and now stood before them dressed again in her old duds—the stuff frock, weather-stained, torn, ragged: the rusty jacket with open seams: and in her hand, dangling, the oldest and most mis-shapen head-covering that was ever seen. And alas! her face was no longer young: the bloom had left her cheek again: she was wan and thin: she lifted her eyes, but they were filled with despair.

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'Florry!' cried Cornelia, 'how dare you? How dare you?' She could say no more.

'I have no right to be here,' said Florry. 'Forgive me, all of you, for sitting among you. I have no right, Laurence! Oh! you kind—good—boy. No—no—don't touch me—don't dare to touch me—Lucy's son—oh! happy Lucy! Give her my tender love. Oh! what will she care for any message from me when she knows?'

'Remember! Oh! remember, Florry,' cried Cornelia.

'I have remembered.' She sank upon her knees before them all. 'I am what you have often called me, Cornelia—I am the Disgrace to the Family. I have never had a husband. All that Cornelia made up about me was false. Forgive me. I will never trouble anybody any more. Forgive me.'

She rose quickly, and was gone. Before they understood what she had said—what it meant—she disappeared.

Thus ended this most splendid Banquet.

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'Oh!' Cornelia snapped her lips with wrath irrepressible. 'She promised, faithful. And we've always been so respectable.'

The first to recover was Laurence, who, while the rest were still staring in amazement, hurried out after the fugitive. The boy Sempronius followed him.

A moment later he returned with white face.

'She's jumped into the river!' he cried. 'I saw her jump, and he's jumped after her, and the tide's running out strong.'

Yes. Laurence was just in time to see her spring upon the low wooden wall and hurl herself headlong into the black waters below. He leaped upon the wall, saw her, a black lump, rolled about in the tumbling hurrying waters.

A strong ebb tide was tearing and dragging the water down stream: at the spot where the woman jumped in there were no barges: the current caught her and rolled her over and over. Whatever air was in her clothing kept her from sinking. Was she

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unconscious? Did she feel in those brief moments the horror of violent death? Did the cold water awaken her senses, or did it dull them? Did she see—as some have reported who have gone through the first stages of drowning—the whole of her past life revealed to her at a single glance with the consciousness that nothing ever dies?

Laurence saw and leaped after her. Oh! Lucy, sitting in the verandah of the Sydney home, did no thought of the peril of thy son and thy sister disturb the peace of thy soul? Yet, but for one thing, they would now be lying in their graves, and thou wouldst still go in sorrow to thy last day.

'She's jumped into the river!' cried the boy, 'and he's jumped after her.'

Then Althea ran swiftly and caught the light sculls of her skiff from where they stood in the narrow hall, and rushed down the Bank Side stairs, and, before they knew what she was doing, she had untied the painter and cast off the boat. She looked across and

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down the river while her boat was dragged out and hurried down by the current. The water looked black: there was a little light above from the stairs, and lights from the bridge were reflected on the river. Then she made out the black rolling lump—which must be Florry. And then she saw another and a smaller lump—only a moving spot in the water—that must be the swimmer. And then she sat down, put out her sculls and pulled with all the strength that her twenty years and her long practice on the river had given her. With strong arms and swift strokes she rowed, and the boat gained upon the swimmer and the swimmer gained upon the drowning woman.

'I am coming, Laurence!' she cried, presently. 'Laurence, I am coming! Keep up—keep up, I am coming!' But Laurence heard nothing.

She said no more, but pulled as never woman pulled before. When she reached them, Laurence was swimming beside the

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floating form, wondering how on earth he could tow or drag it ashore before the woman was drowned. For she lay upon her face, and her head and arms were under water.

'I am here, Laurence!' cried a voice—oh! how welcome!—close beside him. 'I am here. Quick! one hand on the scull and the other under her head. Hold the scull tight. I am quite strong.'

'Turn her bow a bit—so—one stroke more. Now I have her. I cannot lift her, Althea'—he had one hand on the scull and the other on Florry's jacket sleeve—'but I have got her tight, and she doesn't seem to be sinking. Ship the other scull. Lean over the bows. I can pull her along the scull—this way—so—catch her by the collar and hold her tight. Have you got her?'

'Yes—yes—I have her tight. The water rolled her over—I can lift her face out—she is not heavy. Can you get into the boat? Try to climb over the stern.'

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Laurence passed his hands along the gunwale and climbed over the stern—not an easy thing to do when one is encumbered with wet clothes.

'Take off your wet coat,' said Althea. 'Now take the sculls and pull us back as fast as you can. A little more inshore so as to get out of this dreadful current. What a long way we have come down the river! No, don't mind me, she is not heavy, but oh! I think she is dead. Poor woman! Poor creature! I did not know her in her pretty dress. I remembered her when she appeared in those poor rags of hers. Oh! how she must have suffered! Oh! poor creature—poor creature!'

Laurence said nothing but pulled with all his might.

'She neither moves nor speaks,' Althea went on. 'If we had only got her on shore again! Her face is quite white and her eyes are closed, and oh! the cold water dashes over her. Laurence, do you think we shall

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save her? There are the cranes of Bank Side; I can see them now. You can go a little closer to the Bank. Now—oh! here are the stairs, and all of them crowded on the wall.'

It was another arm which lifted the senseless form from out of the water—it was the strong Felix, not Laurence, who carried her up the stairs and across the road and laid her on the bed, while Claudia bent over her and tried to bring back the soul which seemed to have fled.

'Althea,' said Laurence, 'you brought me back to life a week ago. I had only just begun to understand the joy of living, and now you have saved me again.'

'Go in quickly,' she replied, 'and change your things.'

They all trooped back to the house, where Cornelia sat in her accustomed place, her hands in her lap: on her cheeks a spot of red which marked her wrath and shame: and her lips were working, but what she said to herself I know not.

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'She has been brought back,' said Lucius.

Cornelia tossed her head.

'She is senseless—we fear that she is dead.'

'She should have died long ago,' said Cornelia.

Florry opened her eyes a quarter of an hour later, after the most prodigious exertions of Dr. Luttrell. She was lying in bed, and at the bedside were Claudia and the three girls.

'My dear,' said Claudia, 'don't ask any questions. You are in the old house—you are in the Best Bed.'

'I thought—I thought——'

Presently she was so far recovered that she could listen and perhaps understand something of what was said. A strange restfulness fell upon her spirit. The words of Claudia dropped upon her ears like music, and her soft caressing voice soothed her as if to sleep though she remained broad awake.

'Florry, dear'—the voice reminded her

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of the waves playing about her head—'now we understand it all—poverty and suffering and all. My dear, we know all that we need ever know. You have suffered—oh! my dear, you have suffered, how much you have suffered! All the misery in the world seems sometimes heaped upon one person. That we cannot understand. You shall not go out to your sister, my dear. You would be unhappy because you would be ashamed. You shall not have to make up lies and live in daily terror. Lucy would forgive, but you would never forget. You shall not go to her. There is only one place where you can go. My dear, long ago I found peace and rest in the Communion of the Early Church. It is among the brethren that you shall live. There we are all brothers and sisters alike. It is Love that rules us. Where there is Love there is no room for forgiveness. If any sin, we love him still, though he continue in sin. But Love casteth out sin. No one can resist Love. If any are repentant, Love dries their

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tears and warms their heart: if any would forget the shame of the past, Love drops a veil which hides it. Love cannot gibe: Love cannot mock: Love cannot upbraid. Love is tender: Love thinketh always of the other and never of himself.' She clasped her hands, her cheeks glowed and she raised her eyes. She was now the Prophetess of Love and Mercy. 'You shall live with me, Florry. We ought never to have let you go. But we were younger then and ignorant. Do not answer, dear. Shut your eyes and sleep. When you awake, remember that henceforth there shall be no shame for you, or reproach. If you sorrow or repent, that is between the Lord and yourself. Yet we may help. With us there is nothing—nothing—but Love—Heavenly Love—true and unselfish and abiding. This is the kiss, my dear, of Brotherhood. You are now one of us.'

Florry closed her eyes and went to sleep, obedient like a child.

Claudia remained to watch. But the

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girls went down stairs, tearful and silent. Below, Laurence walked backwards and forwards. It was midnight, but no one thought of bed.

'She is quiet and sleeping,' said Althea. 'We may all go now. Come, father.'

'We had the best China,' said Cornelia, her handkerchief to her eyes, 'and the Plate brought out. She promised me faithful. No—Lucius, no, I can *not* forgive her, and it's no use pretending. And now, after all, she's had the Best Bed and Claudia prophesying over her. No, brother, no. I can't do it. I know my duty to the Family, if you don't, and I can't.'

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CHAPTER XXXIII

THE END

'At last!' said Laurence.

He was alone with Althea and in the mid-stream rowing up the broad river on the flow of the tide. The warm September sun was sloping to the west, but still the City on either hand lay basking in the warmth and light.

'We must take to Australia with us,' he said, 'and never forget, this picture of the river in the evening glow.'

'As if I ever could forget the river,' said Althea.

He rowed on in silence past Waterloo Bridge, past Westminster, past Vauxhall. Opposite Battersea Park he stopped and looked about him. He had brought Althea to the

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very same place where they first had a talk. She very well understood why.

'It was on a morning in June,' he said, 'that you brought me here. I remember every moment of that morning. Have you forgotten it?'

'No,' she replied softly.

'Only three months ago. I came home for a simple holiday. I was going to see everything before I went out again. I came to Bank Side just to amuse myself. I thought I would write a letter home about my remarkable cousins, and then go away and forget them all. To forget them! That was my thought. You were among them. I was to go away and forget you all.'

Althea made no reply.

'That morning in June'—he went back again to that morning. 'I remember the fresh breeze, the flying shadows and the sparkling water. You showed me all the places on the Bank as we rowed up. Your mind was so full of them: you were so eager that I should

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miss nothing: you talked as if they were all your own property—and you were so beautiful, Althea—Oh!—you were so beautiful that I was almost carried out of myself.'

The tears came into Althea's eyes—I know not why.

'And then while we drifted here you fell into silence, and I saw that your eyes were looking far away—and you had fallen into a dream. Do you come here still to dream and see ghosts—Lord Bolingbroke and Addison on this bank, and on that Sir Francis More, and on the river the stately barges with the physicians and their great periwigs?'

'No,' said Althea, 'I see no more ghosts. They have all vanished—my poor ghosts—ever since we have been taken out of our seclusion and seen the living world. Since you came,' she added.

In every tale of true love there comes a moment—the one fitting moment—the supreme moment of the wooing when the last word should be spoken and the lovers

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should fall into each other's arms. If it is delayed, it is like letting a bottle of Champagne stand after the cork has been taken out. Something is lost—a little of the sparkle, a touch of rapture, a little of the life—every minute. On the other hand, if the word is hurried and spoken too soon, there is uncertainty with doubt and anxiety. The true joy of Love is clouded. Oh! that young men would therefore ponder these things! And seeing that it is only once in a man's life—unless he be a Rover—that this joy can be experienced, is it not a thousand pities that it is so often miserably spoiled by being rushed, or lamentably made stale with delay? Perhaps the maidens should look to it: the golden opportunity should never be granted until they are perfectly sure of their own minds and the mind of the young man.

Althea knew nothing of Love except as a sweet and beautiful extravagance invented by poets for the purpose of weaving lovely verses and sweet conceits and music that should

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steal over the senses and hold them prisoner. It had been an unreal thing. As for the thing called Love—the Art of Love—why does no modern poet write a New Art of Love?—the Principle of Attraction, the Nature of Selection, and so forth, she understood no more than she understood the art of Flirtation. Poets, you see, are generally vague even when they are most splendid. Now she knew something —Love was no longer an unreal thing: it seemed to her, as indeed it is, a most divine gift bestowed by Heaven upon all mankind, and, like all the gifts of Heaven, proportioned to the capacity of each, so that with one it is of the earth, earthy; and with the other—but this is too high for us. With all her ignorance Althea knew that this day her lover would speak to her and she would give herself to him.

'The ghosts are gone,' he repeated, 'and the living world is with you at last. There should be one ghost left, Althea. Do you never see a ghost who is always, day and

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night, thinking of you, who asks for nothing better than to think of you and for you all his life, to be your faithful servant always and your lover always? Tell me, Althea, do you never see that ghost?'

'Yes,' she replied with her sweet frankness, which went to her lover's heart more swiftly than the most artful wiles, 'I feel his presence always. But only,' she murmured—'only for the last few days.'

Should he at that moment have spoken the last word? Surely there wanted no more.

'I must confess to you, Althea,' he said with an effort, 'I cannot speak what is in my heart until I have made confession. Your father thinks that I came from Australia to gaze upon him. He is quite mistaken. He assumed it. I have never known why, but I did not undeceive him, and when once I had left it in his mind it became impossible to undeceive him. It made him so happy to think that his verses were read everywhere—and it made you, too, so happy, that I encouraged

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him to believe it. I went further—I wrote a review and printed a sheet like the inside sheet of the 'Saturday Review,' which carried on the deception. And then he walked with you down Fleet Street. The people talked about the Poet—he took it for himself. The Poet is the nick-name of a Prize-fighter.'

'I know. Felix told me. They were shouting the nick-name of a prize-fighter, and we were so simple as to believe——'

'Nay, it pleased him. Why not? He shall never be undeceived.'

'I know more than you think,' said Althea. 'The "Saturday Review" article, I have learned, was never in the paper, because I bought a copy with the date. Is it all pretence? Has my poor father no readers—no fame at all?'

'None, Althea, none. His volume fell flat and dead. He has no readers. He is absolutely unknown.'

'My poor father!'

'He will go with us: he will live in our quiet country: our friends will know that he

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is a poet and has published poetry: his new volume will come out, and he shall never be undeceived. Althea, it was for your sake that I conferred this imagined happiness upon him.'

'I know—I know.'

'And he will have you with him, Althea —and—and he shall have me with him, too, his faithful disciple, if you will suffer me to be with you always—always. Oh! my dear—my dear——'

His voice broke. That was all he said. Not till afterwards did he tell her how much he loved her. He only took both her hands and drew her gently and kissed her on the lips, twice. In the evening the poor girl reflected that this thing was actually done in an open boat, in broad daylight, and in the middle of the river: it was actually visible from the Chelsea Embankment: from the houses behind it: from the long walk of Battersea Park: and from two bridges. She turned very red only to think of it. So very

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red that she looked more beautiful than ever, and, if her lover had been there to see, he must have kissed her again. I wonder if any actually witnessed the deed. There was a belated nursemaid in the Park who ought to have been home for tea long before, with her perambulator and the two babies. There was a Policeman looking over Chelsea Bridge, but a Policeman regardeth not a kiss any more than Behemoth regardeth a daffodil: and there was a housemaid looking out of a top window of Cheyne Walk. But if they saw it I know not.

The boat drifted slowly with the stream, the water plashed melodiously upon her bows and rippled along her sides. Laurence sat with the girl's hands in his, murmuring things sweet and foolish. Of most things foolish there cometh repentance in the end, and of most things sweet there cometh satiety: but never doth there come repentance or satiety for the sweet and foolish things of love. As for what the young man

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called his mistress, how he whispered of her beauty and her sweetness, and her grace—to Althea herself these words seemed far to surpass the most beautiful things that had ever been written by the most divine poet. Which shows that everybody who is really in love becomes the finest poet in the world to the imagination of his sweetheart, and, since only imagination is real, this is hard reality. For though the words of the poet be so melodious and so craftily interwoven with rhymes that ring like bells and a measured music which brings tears to the eyes, or joy to the soul, or dancing to the feet, they lack the music of the voice, the beating of the heart, the warmth of the hand, and the longing of the eyes.

Presently he remembered something, and letting her hands go he drew a packet out of his pocket and opened it, smiling.

'You chose them yourself, Althea. Give me your finger, the third finger of your left hand. This is the magic ring: I am the slave

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of the ring: and this bracelet is a part of the chain which binds me: and the necklace is the tribute and token of my allegiance—my dear—what can make you look more beautiful?'

By this time the sun was sinking low.

'You came to me, Althea,' he said, 'out of the sunset. You were in a magic bark, wrapped in a magic glow of golden red and purple, such as never before shone upon mortal watcher. Oh! my dear, can I ever forget it? You came straight from Heaven's gate—I thought it then—I know it now—can I ever doubt that? You were sent to me. And now in the light of the sunset you come to my arms. Oh! my love! my love!'

On the Bank, so fine was the evening, they were all gathered together.

'You will all go,' said the Doctor, sadly. 'I shall remain behind. Urge me no more, Clement. I have given my life to these people, and I must spend among them what remains.

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I had a son, but he is gone. I had a dream, but that has gone too. Leave me all that remains—to work among these poor.'

'In the Antipodes,' said Lucius, 'we shall establish another Bank which shall become, like this, an Exchange such as my father desired for the communication of ideas.'

At the head of the stairs stood Flavia and her elderly lover hand in hand.

'Look,' she said. 'Look, Cassie! Look, Chevalier! Here come Laurence and Althea. Oh! How beautiful—how lovely she is! Look at her face—and at his. She drops her eyes and he is looking at her. Oh! he has spoken at last—and she has said yes. What else could she say? Oh! Happy Althea!'

THE END

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
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